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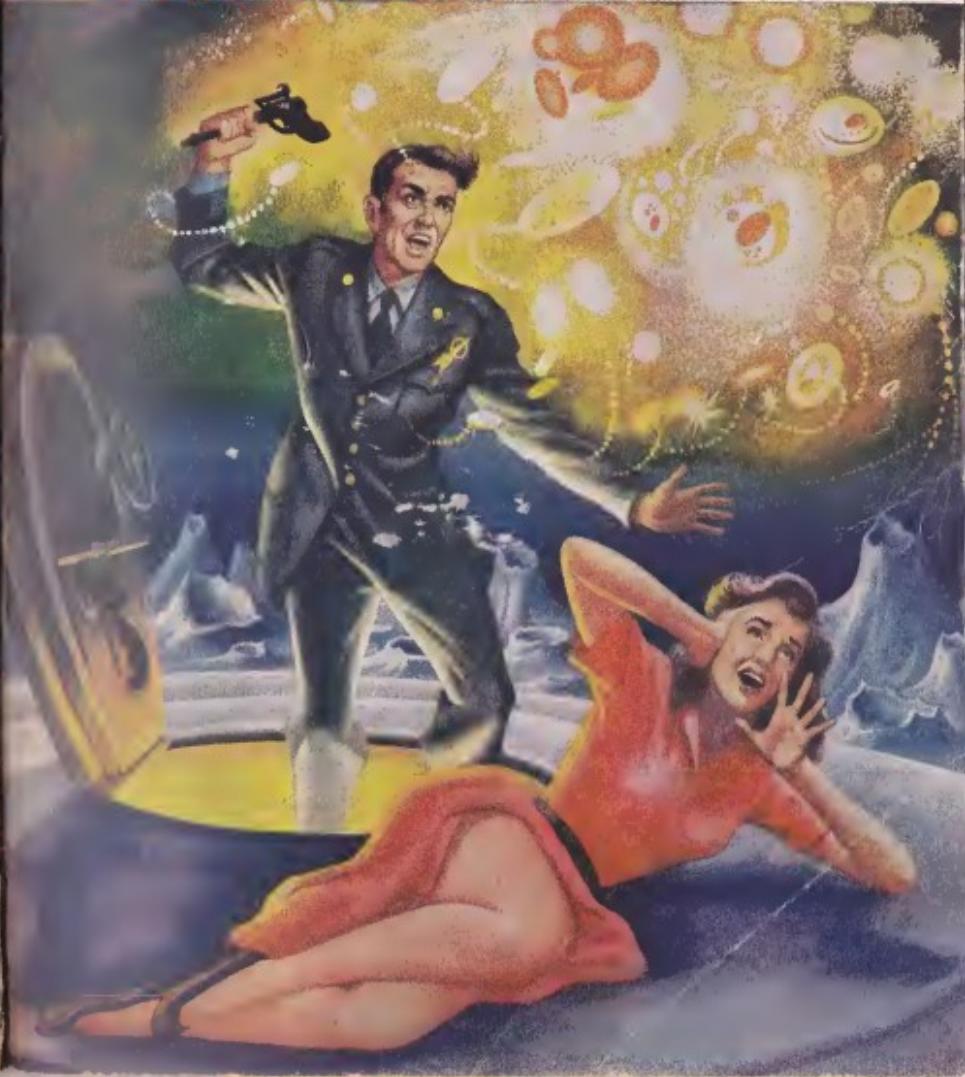
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by Dwight V. Swain

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The Editorial

EVEN THOUGH this issue of *Madge* is dated April, it's the first issue you will have bought in 1957. As such we feel in somewhat of a reminiscent mood. Here we are beginning our eighth year of publication, and during the past seven years we've seen both ups and downs in the field of science fiction. The ups were for the most part during 1951-52, the downs generally 1953-55. From the start of 1956 the ups were in control again. Happily, we cannot see the end of this cycle in sight.

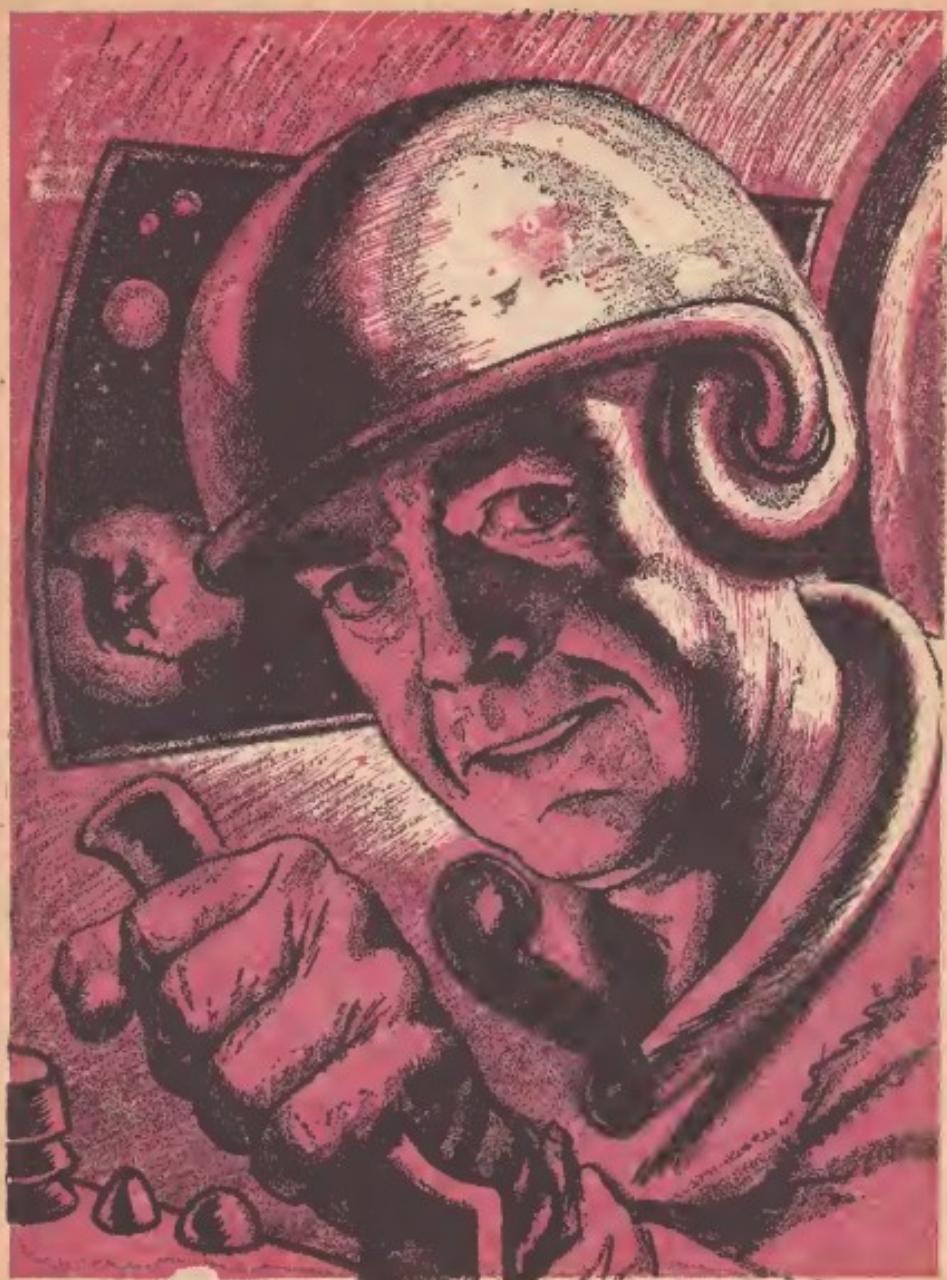
BY "UPS" we mean of course the expansion of the field which is directly related through sales. Similarly, the "downs" reflect contraction. Trying to figure it all out—the reason for "interest cycles"—is something difficult at best. Our personal view is that during '51 & '52 a large transient readership entered the field. Coincidentally there was a rash of "socio-psychological" writing evident in the bulk of the magazines on the market. The transient trade left abruptly—and we don't blame them one bit! That brought on the "downs" which only during the past year has been reversed, largely through the efforts of a few magazines, *Madge* & *Imaginative Tales* included, bringing back to science fiction the theme

of action and adventure; in a word, entertainment.

WE'RE ATTRACTING many new readers into the field, and we're quite happy about it. 1957 should bring in a great many more. And this time, believe us, we won't allow them to escape. *Madge* & *Tales* both start this new year with the resolution that we intend to bring you the best science fiction entertainment possible. We promise you'll be thrilled, rather than bored. So look forward to a big year of adventure into the unknown. It should be fun! . . . whl



"Maybe it was a swimming pool."





From the depths of infinity came a menace so dreadful Clark Dane could not comprehend the danger. Yet his subconscious knew, crying out:

Bring Back My Brain!

by

Dwight V. Swain

IT WAS A WORLD without a past or future; a shining shadow-world borne of sheer madness, a thousand echoing eter-

nities beyond all space and time. Now the pulsing radiance grew brighter—so bright it sent pain-tipped needles stabbing through

Clark Dane's brain. He writhed under its relentless, throbbing pressure; tried to draw back, to cry out.

But the strange lethargy still clung to him, all-encumbering as a leaden pall. As in a nightmare, he lay prostrate, paralyzed, unable to move or speak.

Numbly, he wondered if he were dead.

Only then the silent laughter rose again - - taunting; chilling - - and he knew that life still stirred within him.

The face came with the laughter, floating through the swirling radiance as a shadow drifts through fog. Hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, hairless as a sand-scoured, tide-washed skull, it hovered before Dane like a living death's-head, closer than ever before.

Where previously had he known this Being-Without-A-Name, Dane wondered? What malicious trick of circumstance had brought the two of them together?

Only those were things somehow beyond his powers of recall at the moment; questions that, strangely, seemed to find no answers within his aching brain.

Shuddering, he squeezed the eyes of his mind tight shut against the spectre.

But the face would not go away. Smirking, sardonic, evil, deep-

lined with old sins, it hung motionless now, as if mocking Dane in his torment while it reiterated its eternal theme: "I am your master, slave! Bow down! Bow down to your creator! Acknowledge your serfdom here and now!"

In spite of himself, Dane cringed. "Say it, you fool! Say you are my slave!"

"No, damn you! Never; not ever . . ."

"You dare not deny me! You know it!" The malevolent eyes in the death's-head skull gleamed hot and bright as fire-jewels - - probing, penetrating, skewering to the core of Dane's very brain. "Say it, I tell you! Say you are my slave!"

Dane's jaws ached with pressure. Desperately, he tried to fight the nightmare image from his mind.

"Acknowledge me, slave! I am your master!"

Dane's senses reeled. He was panting now. "I - - I - -"

"Say it!"

"I - - am - - your slave . . ."

Thin, cruel lips peeled back from stained teeth in a grimace of sadistic triumph. The soundless, soulless laughter rang forth louder than ever.

Dane sobbed aloud.

As if his reaction were a signal, the mocking face began to fade, back into the eddying radiance from whence it came. Where it had

hung, a new shape rose.

Inanimate, this one; yet clean-cut and graceful as any living thing. Slim, silvery, needle-sharp, it poised like a gigantic lance flung skyward from its squat, buttressed base.

Dane's raw nerves calmed a fraction. The dream-pain ebbed away. Fascinated, he studied the shining shaft.

For even as he first glimpsed it, he knew in a rush that his life, his fate, his very being, somehow were linked tight to it. Completely strange to him, it yet held intangible elements of familiarity beyond all ordinary knowledge.

Now the shaft seemed to drift closer, just as had the face before it, and Dane saw that a vertical slot ran almost its full length, from top to bottom, like a vastly-elongated needle-eye.

Slowly, while Dane watched, the shaft turned above its base. A second slot appeared, precisely like the first. Then a third. Through the openings, Dane glimpsed a maze of coils and wiring.

Frowning in spite of himself, he glanced down at the base, then stiffened.

For the shaft hung completely free in the air as if invisibly suspended from above, well clear of the metal-rimmed socket in its bed-plate!

A chill ran through Dane. Yet he could not tear his eyes away from the shining needle. It was almost as if another unheard voice, soundless as that of the vanished face, were hammering thoughts into his brain: "Heed well, Clark Dane! Let no detail escape you, lest the lack of it shall speed you to your doom! This shaft - - it stands as symbol of all your dreams and hopes, your destiny . . ."

Then thought and image alike were fading; the face and its mind-voice back once more: "Remember, slave, I am your master, now and always! Dare to challenge me again and instant death shall be your doom!"

Never had the hollow eyes gleamed with such menace. Never had the bony, hairless face been etched more deeply with lines that spoke of ruthlessness and iniquity.

Slowly, reluctantly, Dane bowed his head. "I am your slave. You are my master."

But deep within him another voice was speaking in a savage, sullen whisper, so low as not even to reach the frontal lobes of his brain: "No! I'm not your slave! No man's my master! And some day, no matter what you threaten - - some day, we'll see who dies!"

AT FIRST IT SEEMED to Dane that he was racing through space, hurtling out in a whirling, swirling arc that left the whole solar system far behind. The stars, the galaxies, fell into chaos in his wake. New nebulae spread out before him, unseen by living eye until his advent.

Awe-struck, unable even to breathe, he could only stare at it all in unnerved wonder.

Then, slowly, that stage passed. Little by little, the void about him took on substance, until at last he found himself swimming somewhere far beneath the surface of a viscid sea . . . fighting his way upward through the horror of dark, chimera-teeming depths inches at a time in that agonizing, snail-slow progression known only in the world of dreams.

But there came a moment when even swimming demanded too much effort. He floated, limp, rising slowly towards the daylight miles above him, free to the whim of every changing eddy of a foam-flecked, pale-green sea.

As from afar, then, a voice reached him dimly -- a real voice, this time; one that spoke words aloud and face to face instead of only in the mind.

A woman's voice, surprisingly.

"I want him at the Record Center as fast as I can get him here,"

the voice said firmly. "That's why I'm coming out from Mars to make the pickup. There hasn't been a genuine case of amnesia reported from any of the inner planets in over a hundred years, and I've no intention of letting this one slip by me."

Of a sudden the pale-green sea seemed to separate beneath Dane. It left him stranded on a smooth, level surface, resilient and not too hard.

Cautiously, he moved his fingers over it, recognized the texture of heavy synthetic kalor.

A bed, then.

The woman's voice went on, brisk and businesslike yet somehow intense: "I can't impress all of you too much with how important it is not to upset this man. Any shock prior to the complete celloscopic and hypnoanalytic examination we'll give him here might do untold damage -- both to him, and to our chance of successfully working through his case."

Very carefully, Dane opened his eyes.

He looked out upon a dully glittering expanse of green telonium spaceship bulkhead. The viewing plate of a built-in visiscreen occupied a spot directly before him at eye level.

Centered on the plate was the image of the woman who was

speaking.

Narrow-eyed, Dane studied her. She had turned now to a concise discussion of technical details regarding amnesia -- and that made the contrast between her words and her appearance all the more marked. For even over the visiscreen there was no denying her lithe, slender loveliness; and as Dane gazed up at the smooth oval of her face . . . stared into her cool grey eyes . . . he could visualize her in almost any role more easily than that of scientist or savant.

If he ever met her, perhaps he could persuade her to play a more feminine part.

It was a pleasant thought. But even as it struck Dane, the woman broke off. Her soft lips parted in a sudden, half-rueful smile. "I'm talking too much. You've better things to do than listen to my lectures, and - -"

THE CLICK of a switch cut her off in mid-sentence. A harsh male voice snarled, "I'll say she talks too much! And for my part, I'm all through listening."

Dane shifted quickly; discovered for the first time that he shared the telonium chamber with three men grouped about a table: two in space-fleet uniform and one -- the speaker -- without.

The ununiformed man, squat

and heavy-bodied, still gripped the visiscreen's remote control switch, his piggish, close-set eyes glazed hard with anger, his broad, lumpy face working.

The pig-eyes flicked to Dane as he turned. The lumpy face split in an ugly grin. "Well! Sleeping beauty's awake! Maybe we can come up with some answers of our own after all, before her royal highness from the Record Center gets here."

The man surged up as he spoke, flexing corded arms thick with coarse black hair. To Dane, he looked to be in his late twenties. His body bulged so heavy with muscle that his half-bald bullet head seemed to grow directly from his shoulders.

But one of the space-fleet officers rose too. "Hold it, Pfaff!" he rapped. "Nelva Guthrie's given us our orders -- and whether you like it or not, she's supervisor of the whole Mars Record Center. In a situation like this that gives her the rank to make what she says stick."

"Oh, does it, now?" sneered the man called Pfaff. "Personally, I always thought that where the Kalquoi were concerned, Security outranked anyone."

"The Kalquoi - -?" The second space-fleet officer was on his feet now, gesturing. "Slow down a min-

ute on that, Pfaff. What have the Kalquoi got to do with this poor devil?"

"We picked him off an asteroid, didn't we?" the bullet-headed Pfaff slashed back belligerently. "If that doesn't tie him to the Kalquoi, what would it take? They've infiltrated the whole damn' belt, and you know it!"

"But just because he was marooned there - -"

"Marooned, hell!" Pfaff hammered the butt of a rock-like fist against the doloid table. "Who marooned him, that's what I want to know! No man just pops up on an asteroid, naked as the day he was born, without even a breather mask for company!"

The two officers exchanged helpless glances.

"Answer me, you chitzas!" Pfaff bellowed. Again he smashed his great fist down upon the table. "I want to know who marooned him! And after you've told me that, I want to know who sent out the distress signal on him that we picked up. And who pumped that cave full of air and then slapped an energy seal on it so he'd have something to breathe till we got there. And finally, who" - - a momentary pause while he snatched up an object from the table - - "who left him this Kalquoi yatstick to play with?"

"Well - -" The first space-fleet officer groped futilely for words.

The second looked away, not speaking.

For a long moment Pfaff watched them - - pig eyes aglitter, bullet head drawn far between the massive shoulders.

Then, slowly, his snarl changed to a smirk. He straightened; made a show of smoothing his rumpled short-sleeved, civilian tunic.

"For my money," he announced in a suddenly bland and unctuous voice "we've got no evidence whatever that this starbo" - - a gesture to Dane - - "is even human!"

In spite of himself, Dane went rigid. The officers' heads snapped round as if on springs. "What - -?"

"You heard me." Pfaff was almost purring now. "The Kalquoi are shape-shifters; you know that. That's what makes them so dangerous. One minute, they'll be obviously alien - - crystals floating in mid-air and radiating colored light like so many prisms. The next, one's a rock, another's a tal-string, and the third's bouncing around pretending to be the ball in a byul-game."

A THIN THREAD of irritation began to creep through Dane. Unsteadily, he pulled himself to a sitting position and swung his legs over the edge of his cot. "Wait a

minute, there - -"

"Shut up, you stabat!" Pfaff threw out the command in the manner of a huecco-trainer addressing a particularly doltish pupil. And then, to the officers once more: "Don't you see? The brain-drain's stopped the Kalquoi cold. But supposing they could masquerade as humans, the way they do inanimate objects! Before we knew it, they'd take over the inner planets, the way they have the outer!"

Dane drew a deep, careful breath. "The only trouble is, I'm not a Kalquoi," he announced firmly.

"Oh," This time Pfaff turned to face him. "Then who are you, may I ask?"

"My name's Clark Dane."

"Clark Dane. Very good." Pfaff licked thick lips, as if enjoying the whole situation. "Now, tell us some other things: where you were born; who your parents were; your work assignment number; occupational classification; residence registration; how and why you came to be on the asteroid where we found you."

"Why, I - -" Dane started to speak, then stopped short, groping. "I - - I . . ."

"Yes, yes. Go on." Pfaff was grinning openly now, head thrust forward as he prodded.

A numbness crept through Dane. Desperately, he searched the far-

thest corners of his brain for answers to the other's questions.

Answers that just weren't there.

Pfaff chuckled; goaded: "It couldn't be you don't know, could it? Nor that you can't remember anything about the past except your name?"

Dane didn't answer. Bewilderment; confusion; sheer, stark panic - - they roiled within him; put knots in the pit of his stomach and made his head reel till he had to cling to the edge of the cot for fear of falling.

Again Pfaff chuckled. "Maybe I'm being too hard on you, Dane." His mockery seared like acid. "If so, I'll apologize. Just prove to me you're not a Kalquoi; that's all I ask."

"Damn it, Pfaff!" the officer nearest to Dane exploded. "You heard what Nelva Guthrie said: any shock's liable to tie this man up permanently. Quit plaguing him!"

Pfaff's air of mock-cordiality fell away like a discarded mask. "Is that an order, lieutenant?" he demanded belligerently. "Are you telling me what I can and can't do?"

The other's lips drew tight. "Now wait a minute, Pfaff - -"

"No! You wait!" Pfaff thrust his bullet head forward, close to the officer's face. "This is a matter of principle, mister. We'll set-

tle it right now. I'm Security rep on this ship, and I say this Clark Dane pickup's a Security matter. Are you going to contradict me?"

"If need be." The lieutenant's cheeks flamed. "It so happens, Mr. Pfaff, that you've pushed your luck a little too far. Security rep or not, you're overstepping your authority, and I'm not about to stand for it. If need be, I'll take it clear to the captain."

"Well! So it's out in the open at last!" Pig eyes glittering, thick lips twisted in an ugly grin, Pfaff moved in even closer. "You've got a good idea there, too -- that business of taking all this to the captain. We'll do it. And then, after that, we'll carry it another step, to a friend of mine. You may have heard of him. His name's Thorburg Jessup."

"Thorburg Jessup --!" The lieutenant's nostrils flared. His eyes distended.

Then, of a sudden, the angry color was draining from his face. Uncertainly, he fell back a step. "Now wait a minute, Pfaff --"

IT WAS AS IF the other hadn't even heard him. "Did you think you were going to get away with it, lieutenant? Did you really?" The Security rep exploded in a roar of contemptuous, scorn ringing laughter. "Let me tell you

something, mister. The blocked-promotion stations are full of brass-braided jackasses who thought they could lock horns with Security reps. Because the minute an officer talks back or pokes his nose into Security business, the rep calls Jessup -- and that's the end of the trouble *and* the officer."

For a long, taut moment, then, the silence echoed; a leaden silence, heavy with tension.

"Well, lieutenant?" Pfaff cocked his head. "Which is it going to be? Do you shut up -- or do I call Thorburg Jessup?"

The spaceship officer seemed to stop breathing. Then, abruptly, he pivoted and, wordless, stalked from the room.

Not speaking, Pfaff turned his cold, unblinking stare upon the second officer.

The man's gaze faltered; fell. He followed his fellow from the chamber.

Now Pfaff swung round to face Dane, lumpy features aglow with unholy triumph. Slowly, contemplatively, he scrubbed a meaty palm back and forth through the coarse black hair that matted the opposite forearm.

It made a whispering, scratching sort of sound that rasped Dane's nerves worse than all the earlier verbal pyrotechnics. Uneasily, he shifted; swallowed.

Because strive as he might, he still couldn't remember. Not anything.

The realization brought with it a feeling more frightening than anything he'd ever known. It was as if the world -- his private world -- had vanished, leaving him cast adrift in space blindfolded, without landmarks or triangulation points, all orientation lost.

The sense of helplessness that came with it was almost more than he could bear. Sheer lack of knowledge half-paralyzed him. Desperately, he wondered what he should do; how his role and true identity called for him to react.

Still gloating, Pfaff leaned back; rested his heavy hams against the doloid table. "Well, bucko?" he prodded.

With an effort, Dane held his voice steady. "I can't tell you what I don't know. All those questions -- I simply don't remember."

"Nor this thing? You don't remember it, either?"

As he spoke, the Security rep picked up the Kalquoi yat-stick from the table and held it out for Dane's inspection.

Frowning, Dane studied it. A good foot long, Earth measurement, and purplish in hue, it was formed of some heavy alien metal. The basic outline was that of a slingshot crotch -- a sort of han-

dle that forked into two prongs to form a Y. But a bar across the top closed the fork, and a continuation of the handle came up to meet the bar at right angles, making a T. Bracing members from the point where the stem of the T met the crosspiece ran to the middle of each arm of the Y, then in their turn were joined into a triangle by another crosspiece.

With a little imagination, Dane saw, it would be easy enough to vision the unit in its entirety as forming a word or syllable, YAT.

"It's a funny thing," Pfaff observed with an emphasis anything but mirthful. "No one knows just what these gadgets are for. The best the extraterrestrial ethnologists can come up with is a lot of thes-gas about symbolism and religious significance. That stuff I wouldn't know about. But one thing's for sure: where you find yat-sticks, you find Kalquoi."

Dane made no comment.

"This one," Pfaff pressed, extending the yat-stick, "was lying half under you in that cave where we picked you up."

Dane shrugged.

"That's all you've got to say? You won't tell me any more about it?"

"What can I tell you?" Dane came back wearily. "Don't you understand? I don't know. I can't

remember."

The Security rep's broad face drew into a chill, expressionless mask. His bullet head sank deeper between his shoulders.

"All right," he clipped harshly, flinging the yat-stick back down upon the table. "You want it hard, I'll give it to you that way. This is a survey ship. Start talking, or I'll have 'em throw you in the bem-tank."

"The bem-tank - -?" Dane stared.

"Don't give me that! You know what I mean! Survey ships bring in samples of extraterrestrial life -- the kind of bug-eyed monsters that give a man nightmares even to think about. What they do to you if they get the chance shouldn't happen to a quontab."

A chill ran through Dane. "But I don't know - -"

"Tell it to the bems!" Already, Pfaff was jamming his thumb down on a buzzer button. "You had your chance, you stabat! Now we'll play it my way. You and the narcoanalyst and that vidal Nelva Guthrie - - you'll see who's got the answers!"

Dane's panic was like a light-lance beam twisting in his midriff. "Please - -!" he choked. "Please . . ."

Pfaff laughed aloud.

DANE STOPPED SHORT in mid-breath. The goading, the mockery, the pig eyes, the harsh voice, the badgering -- all these he'd taken.

But the laugh went one step beyond his limit of endurance.

In the fraction of a second his panic turned to roiling, boiling rage.

What did it matter if he didn't know who he was or from whence he came? Why should he care if his past was a blank, his future a question-mark?

Why indeed -- so long as for this one moment he had a course to follow!

Such a course as erasing the grin from Pfaff's thick lips, for example.

And after that -- well, he'd play the other moments as they came along, without regard for past or future.

Savagely, then, he lunged up from the cot, straight at the still-laughing Pfaff.

For the barest instant the Security rep stood frozen, eyes blank with startlement. Then, with surprising agility for his heavy-bodied bulk, the man tried to twist aside, out of the way of Dane's rush.

His hip hit the doloid table. He stumbled.

Before he could recover, Dane smashed a fist home to the blubbery lips; felt them spurt blood as

they crushed against Pfaff's teeth.

The Security rep reeled. Heart surging with fierce elation, Dane followed up, hammering home a rain of blows to head and body alike.

For an instant the other fell back -- head down, hairy arms hugged close to protect the bulging belly.

But only for an instant. Then, with a harsh roar, the bullet head came up again. A fist like a maul swept out in a wide arc, bruising Dane's rib-cage. Another blow caught his shoulders; rocked him back on his heels.

Desperately, Dane threw himself sidewise, barely clear of the other's lunge, and let fly a rabbit-punch.

It landed solidly, but it was still a waste of effort. Pfaff spun about with no sign that he had even been hit, and once again, lunged for Dane.

Taking advantage of his longer reach, Dane drove in a quick one-two to Pfaff's face, then started to leap back, away from the other's charge.

But this time it was he who forgot the doloid table. Careening against it, he staggered for a moment off balance.

The next instant Pfaff buried a fist in the pit of Dane's belly. Retching, half-paralyzed, Dane lurched backward; slumped to the

floor.

A roar of triumph from Pfaff. He launched a kick powered to break a man's back.

With a tremendous heave, Dane writhed clear just in time.

But already the Security man was kicking again -- a bruising, thigh-grazing blow that tore a choked cry from Dane's throat. In desperation he rolled back and under the table, hoping against hope to avoid the other's murderous feet.

Cursing, Pfaff heaved at the table, wrenching the nearest leg clear of its anchor bracket. "You chitza!" he panted, "I'll kill you! D'you hear me? I'll kill you!"

He meant it. It showed in every line and corded, bulging muscle. Stark murder gleamed in his tiny, close-set pig eyes . . . glistened in the flecks of bloody foam at the mouth-corners and in the sweat-greased folds of the contorted face.

Spasmodically, Dane dragged himself to his feet on the far side of the wrenched, warped table.

Panting, Pfaff tried to reach him; then, failing, clawed for the heavy Kalquoit yat-stick that still lay on the slab between them.

With all his might, Dane heaved at the already-sagging table. The yat-stick slid to the floor on his side.

Pfaff hurled himself after it

bodily. Jamming him aside, Dane snatched up the stick and swung it in a tight arc, straight for the base of the Security rep's skull.

Pfaff twisted and it hit -- snapped -- a collarbone instead.

In the same instant the chamber's door swung open. Two space-fleet guards gaped across the threshold.

Face twisted with pain, clutching at his shattered clavicle, Pfaff roared, "Get this stabat!"

DANE LUNGED for the doorway, swinging the yat-stick. It clipped the first guard alongside the jaw; dropped him in his tracks. Dane stiff-armed the second and sprinted off down the passage-way.

But as he ran, alarm bells all about began to jangle. Ahead, a spaceman appeared as if from nowhere, paralyzer at the ready.

Dane veered into the first cross-passage; dropped down a pneumolift to the next level.

More green telonium walls. More bells and guards and paralyzers.

Lurching now, staggering, Dane stumbled onward. It was as if his body were acting independently, without his mind's volition, for intelligence told him flatly that there would be, could be, no escape. Not in a closed unit like a spaceship.

Yet here he was, still fleeing.

Why? Why?

Laughing, he downed another guard with the yat-stick; and even in his own ears his mirth rang a drunken note.

Another pneumolift. Another. And after that, a long, dim-lighted passage.

Dead end.

So this was where they'd trap him.

Only then, as he slumped to the floor, he stubbed his toe on a heavy screw-lock; saw at last the scarlet-lidded hatch on which he squatted.

One more barrier to put behind him.

Wearily, he wrenched the screw-locks open; pried up the spring catch; lifted the hatch-lid; peered down into the space beneath it.

An unpleasant, faintly musty odor. A wall-ladder leading down into pale grey emptiness.

Yat-stick still in hand, Dane lowered himself gingerly through the hatchway and let the heavy scarlet lid fall to above him, wondering as he did so why it was painted so bright a red.

The spring catch clicked into place. No going back now.

Down the ladder, a rung at a time. Ten feet. Fifteen. Twenty.

Solid decking again. Solid . . . yet strangely slippery. And the unpleasant musty smell was stronger now, too.

Something brushed Dane's hand. Something gelatinous and clammy. Instinctively, he jerked back.

His eyes were adjusting to the pale grey light now. He could see better.

He wished he couldn't.

Because the thing that had brushed his hand . . . the slimy, gelatinous thing that now was making the flesh crawl over every inch of his body . . . was a monstrous, many-eyed, pseudopodal horror he couldn't even classify.

But it could classify him, apparently; for already its amoeboid protrusions were eddying in close to his feet with tiny, obscene sucking noises.

Heart pounding, blood chilling, Dane gripped the yat-stick till his knuckles ached. At last - - at last he knew why that hatch-lid overhead had been painted such a vivid scarlet.

It led into the spaceship's benthank!

CHAPTER III

EVEN AS THE REALIZATION of where he stood at last burst upon Dane with full, nerve-shattering force, the creature confronting him moved forward, closing in about him in a half-moon arc that reached from wall to wall. How large it was, Dane could only

guess, for it extended farther into the dimness than he could see, piling up in great, semi-transparent folds almost as high as his head in places, like some monstrous, shapeless jellyfish speckled with eye-spots.

Now, while Dane watched, rigid, the creature put forth another pseudopod. Stickily, the protuberance crept along the metal tank-wall, closer and closer.

A trickle of icy sweat rilled down Dane's spine. Numb, shallow-breathed, he drew back from the advancing tentacle of protoplasm.

In the same instant a chill, moist, odorous Something spewed onto the back of Dane's neck and shoulders; another pseudopod, moving in while the first held his attention.

With a wild yell, Dane lunged for the ladder; tried to claw his way up it.

But the pseudopod clung to him like some loathesome growth, part of him. Before he could tear free of it, the living wall about him swept in, a tide of protoplasm that in seconds mired him to the ankles . . . the knees . . . the waist . . .

Dane shrieked aloud. New strength flooded through him, born of sheer terror. Frantically, he lashed out with the yat-stick, flailing this way and that at the encroaching extraterrestrial horror that any moment now might swal-

low him completely.

But to no avail. Here and there where he struck, the monster's jelly-like tissue quivered a little under impact. That was all.

And still it oozed higher about him. It was to his chest now. His armpits.

Abruptly, Dane stopped flailing. What was the point of it, as things stood now? The best he could hope for was a quick and easy death.

Yet what a place to die, after all his efforts! Here, sealed away in a spaceship's bem-tank! Chances were no one would ever so much as find his body, nor any clue as to what had happened to him.

Which would be a joke of sorts on Pfaff . . . something to try to account for to Nelva Guthrie and his own superiors.

No doubt it would baffle the other man too, Dane decided -- the Being-Without-A-Name, the mind-talker who'd spent so much time and effort trying to force subservience upon him.

Or did that strange hairless, hollow-eyed, fiend-faced man even exist? Thinking back over everything, Dane couldn't help but wonder. In retrospect, a nightmare quality clung to the whole incident, as if perhaps it were delusion, hallucination, rather than reality.

In any case, it didn't matter, because now, dying here, he'd never

know.

And that was too bad, in a way, because there were so many things Dane knew in his heart he'd like to have uncovered. Things like the secret of his own identity, his past and future . . . the meaning of the shining shaft he'd seen and that he knew was somehow bound close to his own destiny . . . the business of the Kalquoi yat-stick, and how it came to be in the bleak asteroidal cave where the survey ship had found him.

The gelatinous mass had reached his neck now. It wouldn't be much longer.

Dane laughed harshly. "Come on, damn it! Get it over with!" He wrenched his right arm free; hurled the yat-stick out into the center of the viscid mass attacking him.

The ooze crept to his chin. Time stood still, every second dragging out to an eternity.

Dane closed his eyes.

As if it were a signal, a rhythm seemed to start up in his brain: *Dane . . . Dane . . . Dane . . .*

His own name, endlessly repeated. The beginning of a death-throe madness, perhaps, Dane decided with a queer sense of abstraction.

Like magic, the pattern changed: *John Dane . . . John Dane . . . John Dane . . .*

In spite of himself, Dane felt a quick-glowing spark of interest. Almost without volition, he spoke aloud: "Not John Dane. Clark Dane."

The rhythm in his brain faltered; broke. In its place came a vague uneasiness, a restless groping: *Clark Dane - -? Clark Dane? No, no. John Dane. JOHN Dane!*

"CLARK Dane," Dane reiterated firmly.

INSTANTLY, the previous uneasiness returned, but multiplied a hundred-fold. Needles of pain shot through his brain. The pale grey emptiness of his prison vanished in a blaze of purple light. Even the gelatinous sea of protoplasm enveloping Dane seemed to transmit a sudden shiver.

Dane opened his eyes.

But the purple light was no pain-born illusion. Rather, it glinted even brighter now than before.

Its source was a crystal . . . a strange, radiant crystal that floated before Dane in mid-air.

Now, while he watched, the purple light changed to green; then red; then yellow.

The crystal, too, was changing. Before his eyes, it writhed and stretched until it was a glowing aquamarine ladder, modeled after the one down which Dane had come into the bem-tank.

A moment later it was a bright blue bottle; then a cerise cube; then once again a crystal, orange and golden.

And all the time, the turmoil in Dane's brain continued . . . a chaotic, inarticulate fumbling, based on some point of confusion between the two names, *John* and *Clark*.

But despite the pain, Dane hardly noticed the groping and the searching. He had mind only for the colored light and changing shape of the weird crystal that hovered before him.

For there was only one thing it could be: a Kalquoi, one of those dreaded alien invaders who'd long since usurped the outer planets, beyond the asteroid belt.

Now it was here, on this ship, headed straight for Mars!

And there was nothing he could do about it.

As if to emphasize the point, the amoeboid monster in whose grip he lay pushed a new pseudopod down upon Dane's head and face. Oozing, enveloping, smothering, it pressed into every pore and orifice.

Dane gasped for breath that would not come. Choking, jerking, convulsing, he struggled against the mucilaginous mass that held him.

It was like fighting quicksand. The creature would not let him go.

IMAGINATION

Fire raced through Dane's lungs. Black fog rose, clouding his consciousness. He forgot who he was, and where he was, and even the pulsing pain of the Kalquoi's sentient probings.

Slowly, then faster and faster, he began to fall . . . to fall . . .

Only then, of a sudden, his mouth and nose, his face, were clear again. Spasmodically, Dane sucked air into his lungs in great, anguished gasps.

When his knees gave way, he slumped to the slime-slick floor.

It dawned on him dimly, then, that the monster had left him . . . that he was free and safe once more.

Why?

Still not quite steady, he looked out across the bem-tank; saw the protoplasmic horror huddled in a quaking, quivering mass against the chamber's far wall. The Kalquoi hovered above it; and when the giant amoeba-thing made a tentative effort to ooze back in Dane's direction, the alien assailed it with sudden, darting light-beams that seared deep into the pseudopodal creature's tissue.

The demonstration was enough for Dane: the Kalquoi had saved him.

But again, why?

It was a question without an an-

swer -- or, at least, with no answer Dane himself could fathom. Besides, for now, it was enough that he remained alive. Puzzles could come later.

Meanwhile - -

But before he could organize the thought, sound came into the tank's stillness: the creak of screw-locks turning; the clink of a spring catch released.

For the barest instant the Kalquoi hovered as if listening. Then, like a candle snuffed out, it vanished.

Dane surged to his feet. Darting across the slippery decking, he found the yat-stick and, snatching it up, stuffed it out of sight beneath his tunic.

Simultaneously, a sudden draft told him the hatch was open. Light blazed -- a brilliant beam that pinned Dane, half-blinded, to the tank's wall.

Yet in spite of his situation, he could not repress a momentary grin. It would be worth a good deal of discomfort just to watch Pfaff's reaction when he found victim alive and monster cowed!

Then a guard called down to Dane, ordering him up the ladder and out of the tank. Brief minutes later, two other spacemen escorted him to the threshold of a room ornate enough for Dane to assume that it must be the captain's office.

THE DOOR-GUARD ordered a halt. Beyond him, Dane could glimpse Pfaff, standing inside the office. But the Security rep's whole manner proved a disappointment. Far from ranting, he wore an air of sullen, savage, inadequately-repressed fury. The thick, bruised lips were drawn tight, the bullet head tilted forward a fraction as if to avoid someone's gaze.

Then the guard pushed Dane forward again, and he saw the reason for the Security man's manner.

For Nelva Guthrie and the spaceship's captain stood side by side across from Pfaff. The officer, bland-faced, stared toward the far corner of the ceiling, and Dane interpreted the way the man's mouth twisted to mean that this was a moment long anticipated and thoroughly savored.

But no trace of amusement showed in Nelva Guthrie's pale, lovely face. Eyes blazing, she lanced barbed words straight at Pfaff: " - - and so, in spite of the protests of this ship's officers, you intentionally and maliciously violated my orders, Mr. Pfaff?"

Muttered incoherence.

"Answer me, Mr. Pfaff!"

"Not maliciously, I said."

"Oh, really, Mr. Pfaff?" Nelva Guthrie's grey eyes sparked. The ash blonde hair rippled as she

tossed her head in a quick, impatient movement. "What would you call it, then, when you abuse a man to the point that he takes refuge in a bem-tank, after I've particularly emphasized it's vital not to upset him?"

A mumble.

"Speak up, Mr. Pfaff!"

"All right, I will!" All at once the other seemed to have lost all control over his temper. The massive shoulders hunched forward; the lumpy face thrust out, bold and belligerent, in the manner of the Pfaff whom Dane remembered. "I wanted to know how come this chitza got stranded on that asteroid. I still do, and I'm going to find out, even with you here."

"Indeed?"

"You bet indeed! You think Security moves over for every little bobtailed slazot out of Records? I'm rep on this ship, and I'm labeling this whole business as Security jurisdiction! You don't like it, you can state your case to Thorburg Jessup!"

Color came to the girl's cheeks. Her voice, icy calm, dropped even lower than before. "How old do you think I am, Mr. Pfaff?"

"How old - -?" The Security rep stared; stumbled. "How should I know? What's that got to do with this?"

"You'll see. Meanwhile, please

make an estimate."

"Well . . . maybe twenty-five."

"You're quite close. I'm twenty-six."

"So?"

"So how many twenty-six-year-old women do you know who are supervisors of planetary record centers?"

Pfaff's mouth opened, then closed again with no word uttered.

Nelva Guthrie said, "Some men, Mr. Pfaff, might deduce from this that such a woman has certain -- contacts."

The Security agent still held his silence.

"In my case," the girl went on, "the contacts are more than adequate." A slight tightening of the lips. "Mr. Jessup no doubt will tell you all about it when he calls you."

Pfaff's broad face went suddenly slack. The close-set eyes drew down to gimlets. "What do you mean, damn you?"

"I mean you've finally overreached yourself, Mr. Pfaff," Nelva Guthrie retorted icily. "Devotion to duty's one thing, self-glorification another. Not even Security will back a man who's so eager for advancement as to endanger a vital project in the remote hope he can bully his way through to personal credit."

"But -- Jessup --"

"Why would he call you, you

mean?" Nelva Guthrie looked the image of wide-eyed innocence. "Why, to relieve you, of course, Mr. Pfaff. Orders are already cleared for your suspension as Security rep for an indefinite period. You unload as soon as the ship ramps down on Mars."

Finality on a level that forbade dispute or question was in the girl's voice and manner. She turned from Pfaff; faced Dane for the first time.

It was a strange moment for him. For as he looked into her eyes, in that first fraction of a second, he saw things paradoxical, things wholly unexpected . . . discernment, warmth, concern, a tender questioning.

It rocked Dane back, almost unbelieving.

Then the moment faded, as if a blind had snapped shut somewhere behind the clear grey eyes. Smiling, yet brisk and businesslike, Nelva crossed to him and extended a slim, firm hand. "Mr. Dane, I can't tell you how happy I am to see you. The Mars Record Center definitely considers itself fortunate to have the opportunity to study your case at first hand."

Wryly, Dane matched her smile. "I'm hardly uninterested myself."

"The sooner we get to it, the better, then. My carrier's waiting."

Nelva's smile was ever so bright.

Yet looking from her to the bland-faced spaceship captain and sullen-eyed, hate-glowing Pfaff, Dane felt a sudden, swift wave of uneasiness.

This business - - somehow, it was all too neatly organized, too smooth.

But there was nothing he could do about it. Not now; not till he knew more.

"All right with me," he shrugged. "Let's go."

Did the blind behind Nelva's eyes flicker for the barest instant? He wondered.

"Good!" Impulsively, it seemed, she caught his hand. "This way - -"

Wordless, taut-nerved, looking neither to right nor left, Dane walked with her from the room.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS QUIET, here in Nelva Guthrie's office in the Record Center. She said, "It takes a few minutes for the cell-sheets to come through, Mr. Dane, and I know you must be tired. Why don't you lie down on the couch while we're waiting?"

"Thanks. I will." Gratefully, Dane stretched out; drank in the cool greens and soft blues of the decor. The climatizer's rhythmic whisper lulled him.

Yet restful though it all was,

complete relaxation somehow would not come. In spite of all his efforts, Dane found himself heir to twitching muscles, sudden tensings. Half a dozen times, he caught himself watching Nelva sidewise as she checked through a pile of papers, as if he were afraid to leave her unobserved.

Why? Because he felt drawn to her as a woman? Because he feared that she might slip away?

Or, because the contrast between the mask of distance she now wore, as compared to the things he'd seen when their eyes first met, was so marked as to make him permanently wary, unwilling to trust her?

The thought set irritation pricking at him. Abruptly, he sat up. "It's no use."

"To try to rest, you mean, when you don't know who you are or where you come from?"

"That's right." Dane spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "Why should I be the first man in more than a hundred years to have this happen to him? You said yourself amnesia's been wiped out."

"True enough," the woman nodded, ash-blonde hair shimmering. "In your case, however, some rather unusual factors complicate the picture."

Dane frowned. "What kind of factors?"

For a long moment Nelva studied him, as if debating. Then, at last, she said, "I guess there's no real harm in telling you. The reason we know you're a victim of amnesia is because the survey ship's psychman ran a narcoanalysis on you. And what you thought was a perception test, downstairs here, was really a hypnoanalysis to check the psychman's findings."

"So?"

"The results were most interesting. For one thing, you didn't respond to treatment. Amnesia's an adaptive reaction to inner conflict, a sort of hysterical inhibition. When the inhibition's released by the Egrisanto technique, under deep analysis, ordinarily the block to memory goes with it, and recall returns." Nelva ran a slim forefinger along the edge of her papers; eyed Dane. "Do you follow me?"

Dane nodded slowly. "I think so."

"Then you'll understand how it startled me when I found no trace of any real inhibition, no sensitive areas you were trying to protect." Nelva spread her hands. "As a matter of fact you reacted freely on every subject covered by the standard tests. And you showed a rather remarkable fund of information on virtually every topic."

Dane groped. "Then what - -?"

"Don't you see? You're holding

back nothing -- yet there's not even the slightest hint as to where that knowledge came from! It's almost as if you were a robot, with built-in reaction patterns and knowledge tapes instead of a human brain."

A chill ran through Dane. He sat very still.

What was it the fiend-faced man, the Being-Without-A-Name, had said to him in those first delirious moments of his awareness that now seemed so long ago? -- "Bow down to your creator?"

Involuntarily, Dane shuddered.

Nelva said, "You're thinking about your dream, aren't you? About how the man said he'd created you?" Her voice was warm with sympathy.

Dane looked up sharply. "How did you know - -?"

"Simple logic. The analysis gave me all the things in your mind -- about the man with the hairless skull who was your master, and the silver needle, and the Kalquoi. When I mentioned robots, it was almost certain to make you think about -- the man."

"Oh."

"You don't need to worry, either. You're not a robot. Robots don't have feelings. Besides, the cello-scope would have shown it if you were. As for the rest -- the shaft the Kalquoi -- I imagine they're

some sort of delusion. Tied in with your amnesia, perhaps -- specialized situations the standard tests weren't geared to touch."

"I see." Dane studied his knuckles.

Yet what did he see? What, really? He wondered.

Certainly not that the fiend-faced man and the silver needle and the Kalquoi were delusions!

For as Nelva talked, her words had come faster and faster. A new note had crept into her voice -- a note of tension. And now, as he watched her obliquely, he became acutely aware that her fingers were all at once ever so restless. Her lips showed a minute tendency to tremble, also, and the grey eyes stayed clear of him, as if the things she said were creating some undercurrent of conflict in her that she feared to let him see.

DANE'S JAW tightened. Breathing carefully, evenly, he thought back once again to the way the girl had first looked at him -- and then, how the blinds had come down, shutting him out.

How could he trust this woman, while that hidden barrier in her eyes still stood between them? How dared he throw aside all suspicion, all caution, so long as she held back secrets?

No; at root the dilemma still

was his, and always would be. Not even Nelva Guthrie could share it with him. He had no choice but to go his own road, fight through to his private destiny.

And what better time to start than now?

Tight-lipped, he said, "All this is fine. But it looks to me like it's going in a circle."

Nelva's hands moved nervously. Her eyes opened a trifle wider than seemed normal. "A circle - -?"

"You claim I've got amnesia, don't you? Only then you tell me I don't react right for it." Dane laughed, harsh and curt. "To me, that says we're getting nowhere."

A knock broke off the conversation. Quickly, as if relieved at the interruption, Nelva crossed the room and opened the door.

A uniformed tech held out a plastic cylinder. "Here's that cell-sheet, Miss Guthrie."

"Good!" There was an air of relief in the way Nelva said it. She turned to Dane; gestured triumphantly with the cylinder. "This is the answer to your problems, Clark! Your cellemental analysis sheet! Come on!"

Shrugging, Dane fell in beside her. He wondered wryly how he had so suddenly been promoted to first-name status.

Nelva was still talking: "A cell-sheet's proof positive of identity,

Clark. By Federation law, one's made for every human at birth, everywhere among the inner planets. All records on that person then are filed under the cell-sheet's pattern. So you won't be a lost soul much longer. Two minutes after we put this cylinder into the interplanetary index system, we'll know everything there is to know about you . . ."

They were in another room now - - a long, narrow room through which busy techs hurried. The walls on either side were banked solid, floor to ceiling, with varicolored index flashers. A black, box-like unit, shoulder-high, occupied the center of the floor. Beyond it, at the room's far end, double doors like those through which Dane and Nelva had just entered provided a second exit.

"This way," Nelva commanded briskly. Leading Dane to the box-like unit, she flipped open one of a row of hinged cases lining each edge, fitted Dane's cell-sheet onto a spool, closed the lid once more, and pressed a button.

She kept up a running fire of small-talk as she worked. It came out just a trifle too animated. Dane decided her primary purpose was to forestall embarrassing questions rather than to convey data.

Now she pointed to a slot below the cylinder-spool. "This is the

place, Clark. And in just two minutes!"

In spite of himself, Dane couldn't tear his eyes from the slot.

Seconds, ticking by . . . dragging out to what seemed eons . . .

Then a bell rang, a single sharp, imperative note. A card spilled from the slot.

It seemed to Dane for an instant as if Nelva had stiffened. A nearby tech looked up sharply.

But already Nelva's hand was darting out. Deftly, she caught the card before it reached the tray and, turning, studied it. Whether by accident or design, her body shielded the record so Dane couldn't see it. When he would have stepped round her, she flipped the card over and stood scrutinizing the punch-marks and code-symbols on the reverse side.

With an effort, Dane held his voice level. "Well? What does it say?"

"Say - -? Oh, it - - it tells the file we have to send to for your records."

But Nelva's voice shook. Her face had paled. Tight-lipped, Dane body-blocked her against the machine and snatched the card from her; turned it over.

The legend's top line was printed in red letters a good inch tall:

NO RECORD

And then, smaller, beneath it:

HOLD SUBJECT IN TOP SECURITY ISOLATION PENDING INTENSIVE INVESTIGATION AND APPROPRIATE TESTS FOR PSYCHOPATHY, CRIMINALITY, AND/OR POSSIBLE KALQUOI CONNECTIONS.

CHAPTER V

WORDS ON A CARD. That was all they were. But they spelled an end to hope.

Numbly, Dane looked at Nelva. White to the lips, she dodged his gaze.

But beyond her, over by the door through which they'd entered, a man who wore a guard's uniform had suddenly appeared and now stood to one side, scanning the index-chamber.

While Dane watched, two more guards joined the first.

Dane crowded close to Nelva. His words came out a raw whisper: "Those guards -- are they after me?"

She didn't answer.

Dane's belly knotted. His hands shook.

But he couldn't afford the luxury of cracking. Not now, of all times.

No. The only course open now was to follow desperation's dictates.

Psychopath? Criminal? Kalquoi agent?

If those were his labels, he might as well live up to them!

Grimly, he let his hand brush the heavy yat-stick still concealed beneath his tunic; forced his face into the caricature of a grin as he gazed at Nelva.

The girl seemed scarcely to be breathing.

Dane said softly, "We're getting out of this place. You and me, together. We're going to walk through the entry door at the far end of this room. Understand?"

Nelva's eyes distended, wide with sudden panic. Her mouth started to open.

Dane caught her wrist in a savage grip; twisted so sharply she came forward on tiptoe, face drawn with pain. "Scream and I'll break your arm!"

Only the faintest flicker of Nelva's lids indicated that she'd heard him. But she turned as he did under the pressure on her wrist and moved with him in the direction of the doorway.

Behind them, a loud voice cried, "Hey, there!"

Dane flung a quick glance back; glimpsed the guards starting towards him.

With a curse, he shoved Nelva forward, ahead of him, in a frantic dash for the door.

They made it in a rush. Heeling the panel shut in the faces of his pursuers, Dane wheeled right down the corridor.

But even as he turned, he came face to face with yet another guard, charging up the hall straight at him.

Savagely, Dane flung Nelva aside. Clawing out the yat-stick, he smashed its heavy head to the pit of the man's stomach.

The guard bent double. Bowling him out of the way, Dane pivoted, braced for attack or flight alike.

Yet to what end? In his heart, he knew it would be the same here as on the spaceship. Sooner or later, his adversaries would hunt him down; trap him . . .

Then, off to his left, a voice cried, "Clark! This way - -!"

Nelva's voice.

Dane whirled; glimpsed the girl beckoning frantically from an alcove. Sprinting to her, he crowded past a door that she held open, and into a cramped, shadowy chamber beyond.

"Now, here . . ." Nelva's hand caught his, leading him onward.

Another door. Another. A room piled high with stored furniture and equipment.

Nelva said, "You can hide here for a little while. After that . . ." Her voice trailed off. She was

breathing hard.

Dane said, "I'm tired of hiding. It gets me nowhere."

The girl's grey eyes widened. "But - - what - -?"

"Which way to your analytical computer?"

"Analytical computer - -?" Nelva looked bewildered. "What computer? What are you talking about?"

"You know what I mean!" Dane bared his teeth. "Every planetary record center's built around one. It's the gadget that organizes your information, sorts out your data, makes your decisions when you've got too many complicating factors for a human mind to handle." He laughed harshly. "That's me, right now. I'm up against too many complicating factors. So I'm going to ask your computer for some answers."

NELVA STARED at him incredulously. "Are you mad, Clark? At best, we've a few minutes' freedom for you. No more. Any moment, Security may send someone in here - -"

"That's why I won't wait for them!" Dane came back fiercely. "Sure, you saved my neck, dragging me in here. I'm grateful for it. But not so grateful I'm willing to stand waiting till someone hunts me down." He hammered a clenched

fist into his palm. "No, damn it! I'll do some of the hunting this time. And that starts with some questions for your computer!"

"But what - -?"

"What questions?" Dane laughed again. "Can't you guess? I want to know that man who claimed I was his slave. About the silver needle. The Kalquoi. Who I am; why I can't remember anything; how it is I've no record in your files. Maybe even about you and what you're up to. Things like that, a lot of them."

New lines etched Nelva's lovely face. "Clark, you can't!"

"Can't I?" Dane paced the floor. "Take me there and we'll see whether I can or not!"

"No, no! You don't understand." Nelva's hands moved in a gesture of frustration. "It's just not that easy to use an analytical computer."

Dane stopped his pacing. He frowned. "How's that?"

"For one thing, the machine's self-limiting. It covers only certain areas of information, likely to be needed here on Mars. But your questions aren't localized."

"Give me an example."

"The Kalquoi. They're a menace to all the inner planets, not just Mars. So when you ask about them, the only answer our machine will give you is a referral to the big System Computer on Luna."

"Go on."

"Even setting up a question properly can take weeks. You have to be sure it's framed within the machine's limitations. Take this man you talk about. I wouldn't begin to know how to key a query on him, with nothing to start from but your verbal description of an emotionalized visual image."

"I see."

"It's the same with the silver needle. How do you classify it -- as art, armament, or industrial equipment?"

Dane nodded slowly. "You make a good case, Nelva." And then: "But I'll still have a try at it. Let's go."

The girl stared at him, and before his eyes the shreds of her earlier composure vanished. "Clark, I won't let you do it!"

Wordless, Dane reached for her arm.

She didn't even try to jerk back. Her words came in a rush: "Clark, you don't understand! Security keeps guards on all computers -- a special unit of Thorburg Jesup's private zombies. They'd capture you or kill you before you even got close to the question boards - -"

"That would make a difference to you?"

"Can I say it any plainer?" The girl's lips trembled. She caught

Dane's hand between hers. "I won't let them get you, Clark! I won't! That's why I'm telling you these things; why I've tried to help you. We'll find some place to hide you, somehow, where even Security can't find you - -"

"Sorry, Nelva." Dane shook his head. "I'm not fool enough to think I can hide from Security, even if I wanted to. And as for what you say about the computer - - well, this is my day to see things for myself."

Nelva drew back. Her nostrils were flaring, yet she seemed closer to tears than anger. "You don't trust me!"

"That's right. I don't." Dane made it flat and brutal.

"But I - - I've helped you . . ."

"Right again. But the way things stack up, I'm not sure why. So till I know for sure, I'll play it my way." Dane bit down hard, fighting down all impulses to warmth and tenderness. "We'll have a look at that computer now."

"Clark, wait - -!"

"Well?"

"You won't have to go to the computer. I - - I'll tell you - -"

Nelva broke off raggedly. She was breathing too fast, and her eyes held a strange, wild look.

Dane stared. "You'll tell me what?"

"About the silver shaft, the needle. That's the only one of your questions I know anything about." The girl came up against him; clung to him, her face an anguished mask. "I wasn't lying about the computer, either, Clark. It is guarded by those awful creatures Jessup's biochemists have bred in the Mercury labs. You wouldn't stand a chance against them. That's why I couldn't let you go there. They're completely ruthless - - all duty conditioning, not a trace of human feeling in any of them - -"

"Forget about that!" Dane gripped her arms. "Tell me about the shaft. That's what I want to know!"

"It's - - it's on Callisto . . ."

"Callisto - -?" Dane stared. "That's Kalquoi territory, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course. They occupied it when they took over the outer planets thirty years ago."

"Then the shaft - -"

" - - is a relic of the days just before the occupation," Nelva finished for Dane. "It was a weapon, Clark - - a weapon set up at Sandoz, the chief human city on Callisto. The Sandoz Shaft, they called it. Only then it didn't work, so people ended up saying it was the Sandoz Tombstone. It's mentioned in all the Kalquoi Invasion knowledge tapes. That's how I know about it."

PRICKLES OF EXCITEMENT

Ran up and down Dane's spine. For the first time he began to feel as if he were making progress, coming to grips with the mysteries which seemed ever to surround him.

"Do you know any more about the thing?" he demanded of Nelva. "How was it supposed to work? What went wrong?"

The girl's smooth brow furrowed in concentration. "As I recall, the shaft was nothing but a gigantic Udellian transmitter."

"A Udellian transmitter - -?"

"Yes. Back when the Kalquoi first came to our system, someone discovered that high-frequency Udellian waves kept them from changing shape or swallowing up things. And if the amplification was strong enough, the waves would even shatter the crystals, the Kalquoi bodies. That was the whole idea behind the shaft: to destroy the Kalquoi if they tried to attack Sandoz."

"And what happened?"

Nelva shrugged slim shoulders. "I'm not enough of a tech in that field to tell you, really. But as I understand it, it turned out that the shaft was one of those things that works fine when you hold the size down to a laboratory model."

"But when they increased the size it wouldn't work?"

"That's right," Nelva nodded. "It seems that when the transmitter got beyond a certain size, the amount of power it took climbed 'way out of proportion -- so much so the available broadcast relay equipment couldn't even activate the shaft, let alone make it effective against the Kalquoi."

"So?"

"So the Kalquoi came, and Sandoz -- all Callisto -- was abandoned." Nelva lifted her hands in a small, sad gesture. "That's all I know, Clark. Every bit."

Dane nodded slowly.

Nelva said, "I'm afraid that's the way it may turn out with all your questions. There won't be any answers -- not real answers; not the kind that can help you. That's why I'm so anxious to see to it Security doesn't find you."

Dane pondered her words for a long, dragging moment. Finally he asked, "Where's that carrier you picked me up in?"

The girl shot him a quick glance. "The carrier --?" And then: "Why, on the roof here, I guess. But of course it's just short-range --"

"Do you think we could get to it?"

"Perhaps." Nelva studied him thoughtfully. "Surely you're not really thinking of trying to get away from Security in a carrier, are you?"

Dane grinned, a trifle thinly. "You never can quite tell about me, can you?" He let the grin develop into a chuckle. "How do we get up there, anyhow?"

"There's a pneumolift. Right through this door . . ." But though Nelva led the way, a shadow lay across her face that might have been irritation, or bafflement, or both.

It was strangely quiet in the building, it seemed to Dane. Especially considering there was a full-scale Security search for him in progress.

He tried not to think about it. He was tense enough as it was, without letting his imagination run riot.

Obliquely, he stole a glance at Nelva Guthrie, beside him in the lift.

The shadow across her face had vanished. Now the girl seemed almost placid. It was as if, in her eyes, everything was going precisely according to plan.

DANE SMILED to himself a little at the thought . . . wondered how long she'd be able to hold to her complacency.

The pneumolift eased to a halt. Warily, Dane followed Nelva out . . . moved after her through the shadows to the carrier station.

Still no guards, no interruption.

A carrier, poised in its launching-rack, sleek-lined and graceful.

"There it is," Nelva whispered, gesturing. "Just be careful. It can't carry you much beyond the gravitational pull. You may end up playing tag with Phobos and Deimos!"

Dane noted that she stood well back, deep in the cover of the platform-beams.

Brooding, again he studied the carrier, so notably unguarded.

The silence echoed so loud it was making the skin along the back of his neck prickle.

Quite deliberately, then, he crossed to the cargo-ramp, making it a point to follow the shadows, close in to the platform-beams.

A stack of loading-cases stood beside the ramp. Pausing briefly, Dane glanced back to where Nelva still stood craning to watch him.

Then, with no warning, he whirled and threw his whole weight against the high-stacked cases.

For a moment they tottered on the ramp's edge. Then, with a crash like cataclysm incarnate, they tumbled down in an avalanche of ringing metal.

But even as they fell, Dane leaped back into the shadows once again. In a rush, he spanned the distance between him and Nelva.

She stared at him wide-eyed,

mouth agape.

But only for a moment. For then, as water spews from a geyser, the carrier erupted guards -- three of them.

From the level below, too, came the sound of running feet, converging on the cargo ramp.

Beside Dane, Nelva whispered, "What is it? What's happening?"

"A trap." Dane laughed harshly. "But of course you wouldn't know anything about that."

The girl's nostrils flared. "Are you trying to say something?"

For a moment Dane leaned forward, not answering.

Then, as the last of the guards disappeared down the cargo ramp, he spun about, swept the girl up bodily over his shoulder, and headed for the carrier at a dead run.

He was already on the loading ladder before the first shout of discovery arose behind him.

Inside, now. The hatch slammed shut. The launching lever pulled.

A sudden, swift sense of acceleration. Then the easing off as equalizer pressure rose to match it. In the viewer, Mars fell away beneath them.

Dane glanced at Nelva Guthrie.

She stood beside him, the lovely oval of her face a study in pallor. Her fingers trembled as she smoothed the ash-blonde hair, and fear

flickered in the grey eyes.

"Clark, where are we going?" Her voice came out a ragged whisper. "Don't you realize they're sure to catch us?"

"Are they?" Dane chuckled grimly.

"Of course. They'll have every landing-platform covered."

Dane laughed again. It was incredible, how well he suddenly felt, all things considered. "Not ours they won't cover!" And then: "Because damn it, we're going straight to Callisto!"

CHAPTER VI

DANE STRETCHED the little carrier's resources to the limit, pushing it as far out from Mars as he could coax it.

Then, at last, when the craft was well established in a satellite orbit, between Phobos and Deimos and beyond all peril from the mother planet's gravitational pull, he cut the power, turned to the emergency distress-call communicator unit, and switched it on.

He knew Nelva's eyes were on him, even before he swung round to face her once again. It pleased him, now baffled she looked. But her lips stayed set in a thin, straight line -- a memento of some of the things he'd said after the take-off -- so he knew she wouldn't

speak till he did.

"All right," he grinned, "what do you give me for our chances now, my dear Miss Mars Record Center Supervisor Guthrie?"

The line of her mouth drew even tighter. So, after a moment, he let drive with another needle: "Or maybe, as an expert on problems and solutions, you don't want to give a dangerous Kalquoi agent like me the benefit of your professional opinion?"

That did it. Dane could see the girl's knuckles whiten. Her eyes flashed, more ice-blue now than grey.

"You're a fool, Clark Dane!" she burst out furiously. "Once that signal's picked up, Security's sure to have patrol ships here within an hour!"

"Maybe." Dane permitted himself the luxury of grim humor.

"No maybe! You know it's true!"

"Or, maybe not," Dane went on, with no heed to Nelva's interruption. "It might even be Security won't pay the first bit of attention to it." He shot a sidelong glance at the girl. "Would you like to ask me why?"

A moment of obvious, barely-repressed fury. Then: "Why?"

"Because not even a Kalquoi agent would be fool enough to try to get clear of Mars in a four-place

carrier." Dane leaned back; stretched. "No; Security's not going to be looking up here for us. Not when they've got all those landing-platforms down below to cover."

It did him good to see the way Nelva's jaw slackened.

"Of course," he observed wryly, "that opens up another question, too, doesn't it?"

"Another question - -?"

"Yes, you know: the question about how you and I are going to get to Callisto."

The last of the anger-lines vanished from Nelva's lovely face. Her lips parted, breathless with interest. "Tell me, Clark! Have you really devised a way to do it?"

"I think so." Dane paused, letting the moment's tension build up. And then: "Only of course that's no sign I'll tell you about it and give you a chance to sour it."

As knife-twisting, it came off very satisfactorily. Nelva's face went white as if he'd slapped it. Her eyes turned blank, hurt-emptied.

Inside, Dane cringed a little. Of a sudden he felt cheap, ashamed he'd resorted to such pettiness even in anger. Miserably, he turned to the viewer and rotated its field, searching the void about him.

But before he could so much

as complete the circuit, the proximity magnetron's gong tolled brassily. Whipping round the viewer's field in the indicated direction, Dane discovered the cylindrical bulk of a cargo ship wheeling towards the carrier. While he watched, the pickup bay's gate slid back. Receiver racks swung out and clamped onto the smaller craft, then retracted once more, lifting the carrier into the yawning bay as the gate slid closed.

Dane ran his tongue along lips gone suddenly dry.

But now it was too late to turn back. Pushing up from his seat, he stepped quickly across to Nelva.

Something in his gaze must have warned her. Eyes wide with panic, she tried to jump up and scramble clear.

Timing his blow with cool deliberation, Dane drove a hard right to the point of her jaw.

The girl's head snapped back. She crumpled with an unhinged limpness that almost made Dane ill.

But com-box blared in the same instant: "Carrier! What's your trouble? Can you open your hatches or shall we cut our way in?"

It broke Dane's spell. Snapping on the carrier's box, he bent close: "I've got a girl aboard here. She's hurt pretty bad. You'd better come prepared to take her off. As to the how and why of it all - well, prob-

ably the best thing would be to have your captain come in first and look it over."

"The captain - -!" The spaceship's amplifier squawked protestingly. "Listen, mister - -"

"To hell with that! You listen!" Dane tried to match the harsh belligerence of the performance Pfaff, the Security rep, had given aboard the survey ship. "I've got the kind of trouble here it's going to take top rank to handle, and I'm not going to waste time talking about it, either. Just see that your captain's the first man to come aboard this carrier. If he's not, I won't take responsibility for anything that happens - - and plenty will, believe me!"

DANE SNAPPED off the carrier's com-box as he finished. Wryly, he wondered what the spaceship's officers would conjure up as being the situation aboard the carrier. Certainly he'd given them no grounds for peace of mind!

But now it was time for him to prepare to receive the captain. Taking the yat-stick from beneath his tunic, he wrapped it hastily in loose plastic strips torn from the carrier's sleeper sheaths till it made a bundle about the same size and shape as his own head.

Then a knocking at the hatch told him his visitor had arrived.

Gripping the bundle containing the yat-stick firmly beneath his arm, Dane levered open the hatch-cover and looked out gravely at the little knot of men who stood waiting on the spaceship's transfer platform. "Which one of you's the captain?"

A tall, thin, horse-faced officer with coarse grey hair, protruding eyes and an uncertain manner gestured diffidently. "Well, I am. Einar Helstrom. Captain Helstrom, that is . . ."

"Good." Dane tried to look even more solemn than before. "Captain, this is the kind of emergency that's for your eyes alone. I wouldn't want to expose anyone else to it till you've passed judgment."

He stepped aside as he spoke. After a moment's uncertainty and nervous shifting from foot to foot, Captain Helstrom in his turn swung aboard and uneasily stepped down into the carrier's passenger compartment.

As he did so, Nelva Guthrie moaned.

The captain tripped over his own feet getting to one side. Eyes seeming to protrude even more than usual, he peered down at the prostrate girl, then turned to Dane. "What - - what is it? What's the matter?"

Dane shrugged. "A little fainting spell. She'll be all right in a few

minutes. But this" - - a brief pause while he held out the package containing the yat-stick . . . "is something else again."

Captain Helstrom eyed the package fearfully. "What's in it?"

Dane returned the bundle to its place tight-clamped beneath his arm before answering. Then, quite deliberately and with an almost academic manner, he asked, "Captain, do you know what a proton grenade is?"

"A proton grenade - -!" The captain's jaw dropped, lengthening his face so that he looked more like a horse than ever. "Not those things they tried out against the Kalquoi once, you don't mean? Not the ones that could tear a whole ship apart from just a little hand-bomb?"

He backed away with little teetering steps as he spoke, halting only when he bumped against the wall of the carrier's cabin.

"That's right," Dane nodded. "Have you ever seen one?" And then, shoving forward the yat-stick package and stripping away the outer layer of plastic till the T's crossbar was revealed: "See, here's the trigger-release mechanism - -"

"Please, mister!" Helstrom croaked, bony hands spread as he tried to push Dane back. "Please, I don't want to see nothing. Noth-

ing!"

"Well, if you don't want to . . ." Scowling irritably, as if disappointed, Dane wadded the plastic back over the end of the yat-stick. "You know who I am, captain?"

"N-no."

"Clark Dane, that's what they call me. Security's after me."

The captain's eyes bugged even further, and his Adam's apple moved up and down. He didn't speak.

Dane went on: "They thought they had me, down on Mars. I got away, though. Dug this" -- he patted his bundle grimly -- "out of a Security arsenal to bring with me."

The horse-face worked. The coarse grey hair appeared close to standing on end.

Dane scowled more ferociously than ever -- as much to keep from laughing himself as to impress the captain. There was something so intrinsically absurd about the whole situation that he knew that one misstep would carry him over into gails of wild, hysterical mirth.

"Captain," he clipped tightly, "how'd you like to have me blow up this ship?"

Whatever it was the captain answered, Dane couldn't understand it. He pressed on: "There's just one way to save yourself, captain. That's to take me where I want to

go. Because even if you hit me from behind -- stun me, kill me -- this grenade will still go off. The trigger's already free. This wrapping's the only thing that's holding it."

The captain gulped -- a hollow, dysseptic sound. "Wh-where do you want to go?" he asked finally.

Dane grinned. "Callisto."

"Callisto!" The grey hair was certainly sticking straight out now. "Mister, why don't you talk about Alpha Centauri or the Coalsack? They'd be every bit as easy!"

"Oh?"

"Security's got the Belt guarded like a vault. They'd brain-drain us before we were half-way through."

"You could set the guides for Callisto before we hit the Belt, couldn't you?"

"A computer-guide ramping on a satellite clear on the other side of the Asteroid Belt, with Jupiter's gravity pull to figure for?" Captain Helstrom shuddered. "Mister, you don't know what you're asking me for. Better to blow up your bomb now and be done with it!"

"Fair enough, if that's the way you feel about it," Dane agreed. He started to unwrap the yat-stick.

As if on springs, Helstrom sprang at him. "No, no, mister! I didn't mean it! We'll go; we'll go!"

Bleakly, Dane nodded. "I

thought you might see it that way. So let's get started. And just for safety's sake, to make sure you don't change your mind -- I'll stay right in your astrogation chamber with you!"

CHAPTER VII

A HEAD, THE BELT began to take form on the visiscreen -- a patternless, ever-shifting array of hundreds of asteroids of every size and shape, all gleaming bright against the black-velvet backdrop of the void as they wheeled slowly through their far-flung orbits.

The vastness of it brought a sense of awe to Clark Dane.

Awe, mixed with despondency and depression.

What chance did one man stand, trying to pick up the thin, tenuous thread of his destiny in this trackless chasm that was outer space? How could he hope to find identity, in a gulf so boundless that whole worlds were forever lost?

He'd been mad even to think -- to dream -- of choosing such a course.

Yet had he really chosen it? Was it truly his own will that had brought him to this moment?

Bleakly, he wondered; and as he did so, the old, infuriating sense of being a pawn in all he did . . . driven by another, larger will . . .

swept over him once more.

Was he really a slave, thrall to the hairless man, the Being-Without-A-Name? Was it some darkly subtle conditioning, rather than his own impulses, that drove him?

Again -- always; forever -- Dane wondered . . .

But now, abruptly, the ship's com-box came to life to interrupt him: "Cargo Vessel 214XB7! Cargo Vessel 214XB7!"

It brought Dane back to the here-and-now -- the cramped, instrument-banked, astrogation chamber of the spaceship. Gripping the yatstick package tighter than ever, he tore his eyes from the wonders spread on the visiscreen and once again looked on horse faced Captain Helstrom and pale, silent, tight-lipped Nelva Guthrie.

The com-box blared again: "Cargo Vessel 214XB7! Acknowledge, Cargo Vessel 214XB7!"

"That's us," the grey-haired captain grunted. He started to reach for the switch to the ship's own communicator unit.

Dane caught his arm. "No."

"What --?" The captain's protruding eyes fixed on Dane uneasily. "You can't just ignore that call, mister. That's a Security blockade station. Stall 'em and they'll throw their brain-drain on you!"

Dane laughed harshly. "They'll do it anyhow, won't they, when

they find we're heading through the Belt?"

The captain's Adam's apple bobbed. His narrow horse-face drew longer than ever. "Well . . . yes, I guess so."

"Get ready for it, then. Set your guides."

"On Callisto . . . ?"

"On Callisto."

A shudder ran through the captain. "You ever been brain-drained, mister?"

"No."

"Well, I have, and it ain't fun. You're out of control. Completely."

A tiny chill touched the nape of Dane's neck. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Nelva watching him - - the first hint she'd given that she knew he existed since they'd reached the astrogation chamber.

Once more, the com-box: "What the devil's the matter with you, 214? This is Security talking! We want an acknowledgment right now! You're already into blockade area. Wheel around fast, back away from the Belt, or we'll slap a drain on you!"

Another voice - - this one from the amplifier of the ship's own communications network: "Captain Helstrom! Security's trying to get you! They say you're headed into the Belt! Is something wrong? Your door's locked. We can't get

in to you . . . "

Dane ran his tongue along his lips. He could feel his companions' eyes upon him. The tension in the astrogation chamber was soaring higher every second.

"Cargo Vessel 214XB7, this is a last warning! Acknowledge this call and turn back at once! Failure to comply within thirty seconds will result in disabling dynamoencephalolytic action! Repeat, failure to comply within thirty seconds will result in disabling dynamoencephalolytic action . . . "

The captain and Nelva Guthrie, staring . . . gleaming pinpoints on a darkened visiscreen . . . a silver shaft and a hairless ghoul who laughed and laughed . . .

Dane sucked in air. "Are your guides set, Captain?"

"Computer guides set." Resignation and despair mixed in the grey-ing officer's voice.

"For Callisto?"

"For Callisto."

Seconds, ticking by. Dane counted them as they passed.

Fifteen to go. Ten. Five. Four. Three. Two. One . . .

Nothing happened. Frowning, Dane started to turn to Helstrom.

IT HIT HIM, then - - a sudden blazing bolt of power that surged and seethed through his brain. Dimly, as from afar, he was

aware that the yat-stick package had slipped from his grasp and fallen to the floor, the truth as to its contents revealed as the plastic covering fell away. For his own part, a strange paralysis seemed to grip him. He stood upright, erect as before; yet it was beyond his power to move a single muscle. Sight and hearing - - he still had them, but with vastly limited acuity. And while his brain still functioned, it seemed to work slowly, painfully, as if laboring under almost more of a burden than it could bear.

The captain and Nelva remained within the far periphery of his vision. Like him, both stayed motionless, frozen in the stance in which the brain-drain had trapped them.

Now Dane focussed on the visiscreen. Moment by moment, it gave him the record of the course the robot-directed spaceship followed. Asteroids loomed, big and small; then disappeared once more.

How long that phase went on, Dane never knew. His sense of time was far too warped to allow for even a reasonably intelligent estimate.

But finally, the last of the asteroids fell away. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the great globe of giant Jupiter moved in from the lower left corner of the

screen.

Numbly, Dane watched and wondered. What, if anything, would he find at Sandoz? Or would the city even be there? No one could say for sure, for no human had set foot on Callisto in the thirty years since it had been abandoned to the Kalquoi.

Only then, before he could even glimpse any of the satellites that swept around Jupiter, a new object flashed onto the visiscreen.

It was close, this one - - so close that if he'd had the power, Dane would have covered his eyes out of sheer panic. Ball-round, the thing at first looked for all the world like a wandering asteroid or, perhaps, a giant meteor.

Yet there was a strange sheen about it; a too-perfect symmetry.

For a long moment, it hovered so close that it occupied almost half of the visiscreen. Then, suddenly, a light blazed from a point close to its perimeter: a tight cone of blinding radiance that turned the whole viewing plate white.

The next instant, the visiscreen went dead.

The lights died, too - - all save the self-contained, dimly-luminous emergency radiation lamps. The rhythmic throbbing of the ventilating system halted also. So did the force drive's heavier beat. A sudden, incredible feeling of lightness

came over Dane. Then his angle of view changed, and he realized that -- unaware -- he'd drifted clear of the floor; was now floating in mid-air. So the artificial gravity was off too.

A numb horror crept through him in the same instant. In his mind he cursed himself for a blind, imperceptive fool.

The thing he'd seen on the now-blank screen was no asteroid or meteor, but a globe-ship, a Kalquoi globe-ship! And the light was some sort of energy-diverting ray that had the power to incapacitate spaceship equipment.

So this was the end of his mad venture: not at Sandoz, not on Callisto, but here, aboard this crippled craft, destined perhaps to drift forever in blackness on the void-tides between the Asteroid Belt and the Outer Worlds.

Dane would have killed himself in that moment, if he could.

But he couldn't even do that. No; he could only hang here in the dimness, paralyzed, somewhere between floor and ceiling, waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . .

But now light crept through the gloom -- a pale, purplish radiance Dane found somehow vaguely familiar.

Then a slight movement of the ship changed his position. His eyes, searching, found the source of

light.

It came from the unforked end of the Kalquoi yat-stick Dane had wrapped in plastic to simulate a proton bomb. While he watched, it grew brighter . . . brighter . . . as if the metal bar were oozing energy the way a fresh-cut spring twig oozes sap.

Now the radiance grew to an eddying, pulsing ball, so intense it lighted up the entire astrogation chamber.

THE NEXT INSTANT there was a sort of soundless snap. Before Dane's eyes, the radiance transformed itself into a glowing crystal that rose and floated in mid-air.

A Kalquoi --!

There seemed to be no pattern nor rhyme nor reason to the alien's actions. Now it hovered; now it darted. One moment it drifted close to the floor; the next, explored the ceiling.

And all the time it radiated changing shapes and colors: a glistening silver corkscrew . . . the dull grey of a microreel case . . . pale blue ovals that resembled nothing Dane had ever seen.

Then sound came -- the muffled clang of heavy hatch-lids. At once, the Kalquoi moved to the astrogation chamber's door and poised there, apparently waiting.

A moment later the door swung open. Two other aliens joined the first.

The three pulsed and glowed together briefly. Then one detached itself from its fellows and moved in close to Dane.

Immediately, he felt himself permeated by a strange, slightly prickling sensation, as if a slight electric current were being sent through him. Warmth enveloped him. The idea of sleep took on unique appeal.

Now the alien moved towards the door once more; and to Dane's intense surprise, he found himself following, drawn along bodily through the gravitationless ship like a towed target. In a sort of roseate haze -- for fear, as of the moment, seemed to have lost its meaning for him -- he wondered what would happen when he was transferred to the Kalquoi globecraft. So far as he knew, the aliens themselves had no necessity for breathing, so the odds were against there being any air supply adequate to enable a human to survive.

But instead of moving him to the globe, the alien took him to the carrier in which he'd escaped from Mars; loaded him into it.

A moment later the second Kalquoi appeared, Nelva in tow. In seconds, she was installed in the carrier alongside Dane. Then, as

if by magic, the hatch swung shut, and they were left alone.

Minutes dragged by, a dreary procession.

Then, so abruptly the shock rocked Dane, the paralysis that gripped him vanished. Feeling, the power of movement, flooded back into his body. His brain clicked into high gear, no longer dim nor foggy.

A moment later the carrier's gravity unit came to coughing life. Dane found that once again he had weight and could move about at will.

It brought him a quick surge of relief from inner tension; a sense of control over his situation.

He was glad. He had a feeling he was going to need all such he could get.

Beside him, Nelva Guthrie whispered incredulously, "Clark -- I can move! The brain-drain -- it's off!"

"Could be," Dane nodded. He felt weak in the knees, just hearing the girl's voice -- partly out of relief to know that she'd survived the ordeal of the brain-drain, partly because she seemed to have forgotten or be overlooking their earlier hostilities.

"Then we must be almost to Callisto!" New excitement crept into Nelva's voice. "That's the only way to explain it, Clark. We must

be so far beyond the blockade stations that their relays are too weak to maintain catatonia!"

"Maybe."

"Maybe? What kind of talk is that?" Nelva's tone suddenly was tinged with irritation. "Can you offer any better explanation?"

"Yes, I think I can," Dane answered thoughtfully. "Especially if you stop to consider that the Kalquoi took over back while the brain-drain still had us stiff as boards."

"Still stiff - -?" Nelva broke off sharply. Her lips trembled as she drew a quick, shallow breath. "Clark, you can't mean it!"

In spite of their plight, Dane couldn't help but smile wryly. "I can't mean what?"

"You know!" The girl's ash-blonde hair rippled as if a chill were passing through her. "You can't mean - - that - - the Kalquoi - -"

"- - that the Kalquoi have come up with an answer to the brain-drain?" Dane finished to her. "As a matter of fact, that's just exactly what I think. The way it looks to me, they've licked the thing, a hundred per cent."

Nelva's face was white, her breathing too fast. "But - - Clark - -"

"What's going to happen, you mean?" Dane shook his head. "I

don't know, any more than you do. But one thing's certain: if I'm right, as of this moment all Thorburg Jessup's Security blockade stations on the inner-planet side of the Asteroid Belt are just so much scrap equipment."

The girl stared at him. He couldn't read the things in her grey eyes, and when her lips moved the words came out an incoherent whisper. She covered her face with her hands. Her shoulders shook with soundless, racking sobs.

A WAVE OF TENDERNESS swept over Dane, so poignant it made his whole throat ache. Taking the girl in his arms, he held her to him, smoothing the soft hair, bracing her shoulders against the sobs.

The tears stopped, after a moment. Nelva raised her head; looked up at him, trying to smile even while her lips still trembled.

Gently, Dane said, "Don't worry, Nelva. We'll make it somehow."

"Don't lie to me, Clark. I know what's going to happen, and it really doesn't matter." The girl's lips still smiled, but a shadow lay across the grey eyes. "Just one thing, though, Clark: I've got to tell you, and you've got to believe me. I've never betrayed you, not ever, even for a moment." A pause.

The grey eyes, falling again. "You see, I've - - I've always loved you, ever since the first, so long ago - - long before you remember. Only I couldn't help you, didn't dare to tell you, even a little . . ."

Dane stood very still. "You . . . didn't dare tell me?"

"No. Because I didn't know enough - - about you; your potential . . ."

"But *what* didn't you dare to tell me?"

Nelva buried her face against his shoulder. Her words came muffled now. "About the things you wanted to know - - who you are, where you came from, the hairless man."

Dane's heart pounded. Silently, savagely, he fought against letting his voice soar with his tension; against drawing his arms too tight about the girl's slim shoulders.

"About the silver needle, too?" he pressed gently.

"No. Not that. I never knew too much about the overall picture; only the one part."

The tension was too great. Dane could stand it no longer. Spasmodically, he gripped Nelva's shoulders. "Then tell me what you do know, damn it! Who am I? How did I get on that asteroid? Why weren't my records in your files?"

"Please, Clark!" Nelva twisted. "I'm going to tell you. I want to. There's no need to hurt me - -"

"Sorry, Nelva." Dane let go of her; turned away, ashamed. "It drives me, Nelva. I've got to know. Everything, everything . . ." He drove his clenched fist savagely into the palm of the other hand.

"I understand, Clark." The girl's hand was on his shoulder now. "You see - -"

The carrier hit something, with an impact that threw them both, sprawling, to the floor.

Dane braced himself for further shocks. When they didn't come, he scrambled up; helped Nelva to her feet.

Before they could more than right themselves, however, the entrance hatch opened. An unfamiliar atmosphere rushed in, strangely scented yet breathable.

Raw-nerved, Dane stumbled to the open door and looked out.

The carrier lay on solid ground, in the shadow of the great Kalquoi globe-ship. An open port indicated that the smaller craft had been dumped unceremoniously from the larger.

Arm about Nelva, Dane turned now and looked off beyond the Kalquoi vessel.

Then, involuntarily, he stiffened. A chill of excitement ran through him. Instantly - - instinctively, almost - - he recognized the scene before him; knew the truth.

They stood upon Callisto!

CHAPTER VIII

THIS WAS SANDOZ, man's last stronghold among all the outer satellites and planets . . . fallen citadel, thirty years abandoned now.

Ruin's hand lay heavy upon it. Crumbling walls, and shattered structures sprawled everywhere, and great saw-leaved, turquoise-blue plants half concealed long stretches of the cracked, disintegrating pavement. Scarcely a building stood staunch and whole.

Yet there was no mistaking the place. For though the last edifice might fall, the city's shining silver shaft still thrust up stark and proud into the sky.

Dane stared at it, fascinated, hardly able to tear his eyes away. It was compulsive, the inner drive he felt to draw still closer to it. Yet even though he recognized it as such, he could not fight it down.

Why did it pull him so -- this strange, sky-spiking needle? Why, in spite of all logic, did the feeling surge so strong in him that his destiny was bound tight to his half-forgotten hope-gone-dead men called the Sandoz Shaft?

But only one segment of his brain kept up the wondering. For in his heart he knew the answer didn't matter. Not when the tie

that linked him to the needle was strong enough to lure him across a million miles and more of void to certain death, here on this alien-fettered world.

Bleakly, he looked across to Nelva, and wished he could be with her in this hour. But the Kalquois seemed to have rather definite ideas of protocol at this stage, and one of them involved his separation from the girl.

Now, parallel but on opposite sides of what once had been the city's central thoroughfare, Dane and Nelva trudged from the carrier towards the distant shaft. A sort of honor guard of Kalquois surrounded each of them, directing them in the way they were to go by means of sudden, small, darting beams of light that stung like so many angry insects.

The shaft grew larger as they approached, till Dane was staring up at it in awe. With every step, the compulsive drive he felt to reach the needle grew stronger in him. Nothing else could hold his interest or attention. Once, briefly, he even caught himself wondering why it had seemed so important to him to hear Nelva's answers to his questions; to know his own identity, and that of the fiend-faced man without a name.

As if such could ever matter, when destiny lay at the foot of the

Sandoz Shaft!

They reached what must once have been a small park, now. The street they'd followed ended in it. But mere lack of pavement seemed to mean nothing to the Kalquoi. Unhesitating, they herded their charges on across the open green.

And now, on the far side, Dane caught his breath. Before and below him, a broad natural bowl had been developed into an amphitheatre, back in the days of Callisto's human occupation. The metal-rimmed base of the silver shaft stood in the center of the arena at the bottom.

But even the shaft was as nothing in this moment. For never had Dane looked down on a stranger sight.

For Kalquoi crowded the dish-like hollow, hovering like fireflies among the fallen pillars and shrub-masked seats. Hundreds of them; thousands - - they pulsed and glowed and changed shape amid the ruins, till the amphitheatre itself was transformed into a fantastic fairyland of energy and light.

But his escorts gave him no time for pause or contemplation. Already they were urging him down the nearest aisle to the arena below.

Then, at last, there was an end to his scrambling and stumbling

through the debris. His guards halted him, close by the base of the Sandoz Shaft.

The drive to reach the giant needle boiled in Dane, almost overwhelming. But when he would have tried, a quick flick of light from one of his captors turned him back. He could only stare greedily, drinking in the strangeness of the towering monument with his eyes.

And it was weird enough to hold any man's attention. Just as Dane remembered from his vision, the needle stood unsupported, a silver lance suspended in mid-air, completely clear of base, socket, bedplate.

Studying it here at close range, Dane could see how delicate was its balance. The point quivered visibly where it hung above the socket, dancing like a plastic ball atop an airstream. Vibrations ran the slim length of the needle, till it seemed to turn into a flickering razor-edge of light.

How could it be? A beam of some sort - -?

SOMETHING STUNG Dane's flank, then. The pain stabbed so sharp he whirled by reflex, questions and shaft alike momentarily forgotten.

As he did so, a light-beam flicked at his elbow, flame-hot. His guards were urging him to move-

ment again, prodding him diagonally ahead till he stood directly in front of the shaft, but with his back to it.

Now he saw that Nelva Guthrie, too, had reached the arena. Surrounded by her captors, she stood to the left of the shining needle, just as a moment before he himself had stood to its right.

But the Kalquoi gave him little time for such observation. While he watched, a small group of them moved out into the arena and took places in a semicircle close before him.

Dane's guards fell back before the newcomers. In the seating area up along the amphitheatre's sloping sides, the assembled crystalline, light-emitting aliens eddied closer, glowed brighter. A hush seemed to fall over the hollow. Tension climbed like a spaceship at escape velocity.

Dane stood very still. There was nothing he could do but wait.

Then, suddenly, one of the Kalquoi in the tight arc close before him pulsed vivid scarlet. A familiar impulse leaped into Dane's brain . . . a patterned, rhythmic groping: *John Dane . . . John Dane . . . John Dane . . .*

Dane sighed; tried to concentrate upon his answer: "Not John Dane. Clark Dane. Clark, not John . . ."

From then on, there was tumult and fumbling and confusion. Wordless and incoherent, alien intelligences probed every fold and convolution of Dane's brain.

Out of it all, for Dane, came not words, but feelings; not intelligibility, but insight. Slowly, deep within him, there began to grow the weird panorama of a race so alien man could never hope fully to understand it. A concept took form -- the concept of a life-type composed wholly of radiant energy, without permanent shape or body . . . beings that found their only reason for existence in the acts of shape-building and light emission. In his mind's eye, Dane saw how they replenished their life-force, transmuting into energy whatever convenient objects came to hand.

And because these aliens, these Kalquoi, themselves had no need for bodies or possessions, they'd been unable to conceive that other species might require such things . . . might even be harmed if bodies and possessions were transmuted.

But now, at last, glimmerings of this truth had reached them. They'd begun to see the harm they'd done; were sorry for it.

Would man, in his turn, meet them half-way? If they'd stay clear of him and his possessions and allow him to return to the outer

planets, would he abandon the disconcerting brain-drain that prevented their shape-changing and transmuting? True, the magnetic shield they'd developed protected them from it, after a fashion. But it was a nuisance. If possible they'd prefer to operate without it . . .

Numbly, Dane tried to force his aching brain to function. If only he could find the concepts - - !

He verbalized it, spoke aloud in hope that meaning would somehow come through: "Yes, yes. Man wants peace as you do. He'll go half-way and more - - "

The arc of Kalquoi pulsed approval. All but one.

The others' glow slowly faded.

Instantly, like a bomb bursting, the lone dissenter flared emerald and purple, a radiance so brilliant that Dane reeled back, near-blinded.

His brain reeled, too. For such was the burst of energy the Kalquoi spewed into it that flame seemed to sear at every cell. Dane screamed aloud, writhing in torment.

The flame snuffed out. The pain ebbed slowly. But a message stayed, fire-written: *If all men want peace as you say, why have the others scorned us? Why are you the only one to open your brain to us?*

Dane groped. "The others - - ? What others?"

But no coherent answer reached him; only a jumble of fragments and half-impressions. He sensed that the Kalquoi were arguing among themselves while he stood by, forgotten.

As if to prove him correct, his guards now goaded him back to his earlier post to the right of the Sandoz Shaft. Simultaneously, the other group of guards moved Nelva forward to the spot in front of the shining needle where Dane himself had stood.

Swaying a little from the aftermath of pain and mind-fatigue, Dane tried to watch her.

But now, all at once, his compulsion to reach the shaft was again upon him. It was stronger, this time; stronger than ever before. It was all Dane could do to resist it.

Yet resist it he must, for his captors still stood close by, and he had no taste for the sting of the light-beams they flung at him.

GRIMLY, HE CONCENTRATED on Nelva Guthrie, trying to force himself to think of her instead of the sky-thrust lance so close beside him.

Strain-lines marred the girl's blonde beauty now. Her hair was tangled, her cheeks pale, her lips

trembling.

And yet, for all of that, she was still the loveliest thing Clark Dane had ever seen. The yearning for her gnawed at him like a physical hunger.

Now the interplay of form and color from the line of Kalquoi indicated they were probing her mind. Dane could see her straighten, just a little . . . breathe a fraction faster. Her hands moved, rubbing at the side-melds of her garment as if to scrub sweat from her palms.

More shapes, more colors from the Kalquoi. More signs of tension from Nelva Guthrie. Dane could catch only fragments of the projected thoughts and feelings.

Yet something was wrong. Instinctively, he sensed it. A knot drew tight, deep in his belly. He breathed harder.

To what purpose? No matter what happened, there was nothing he could do. He knew that.

Only - - Nelva - -

He never finished the thought. For abruptly, without warning, the same Kalquoi who minutes before had sent the searing charge through Dane's dazed brain blazed again - - a great flash, orange and white and turquoise. The thought smashed in, so violent that even at this distance - - even though it was directed at Nelva - - the impact made Dane's head reel: *She-creature, you*

close your brain to us! You hold back like the others! You want no peace - -

Nelva's scream came like an agonized, overriding echo. Blindly, she staggered forward, clutching her head between her hands.

But the Kalquoi gave no heed. As if the girl were not there, he deluged the whole area with a raging, searing, tidal wave of energy.

Nelva sagged to her knees. Her cry was the keening of a soul in torment.

It was a trigger to turn a man to utter madness. Spasmodically, Dane started forward.

But there was no way to reach the girl, and in his heart he knew it. Too many Kalquoi, too many light-beams, stood ranged between him and her.

But the shining needle, the Sandoz Shaft - - it was relatively unprotected for the moment - -

Spinning, Dane dived towards it - - low, beneath the level at which his captors hovered.

His shoulder crashed against the heavy, buttressed base. His hands closed on a corroded telonium bar. Tearing it from the litter, he surged up, heedless to the light-beams that stung at his back and sides.

The bar had weight to it. Dane swung it with all his might,

straight at the seemingly empty space between socket and needle-tip.

If only he could upset the delicate balance of forces that held the shaft upright, and bring it crashing down, almost anything might happen!

The blow hit square and true. But to Dane, it was as if he'd struck the bar against a daggad column. Pain shot up his arms, clear to the shoulders. The telonium strip tore from his hands and sailed through the air nearly fifty feet.

Before the bar even hit the ground, a bolt of energy struck Dane. Helpless, hopeless, sobbing with fury at his own inadequacy, he found himself slammed back bodily against the metal rim that girded the shaft's base. His hands clamped to the alloy.

It was a moment completely incredible; a moment beyond all possibility of belief. For as Dane's hands touched the rim, sparks leaped from flesh to metal. His whole body convulsed. Blue flame crackled in a tight sheath round him. Power pulsed through every bone and muscle in a surging tide.

Then sound came -- a high, thin skirl, louder and louder, till Dane thought his eardrums must surely burst.

But the sound still welled and

swelled and echoed; and now numbly, it dawned on Dane that something was happening to the Kalquois. Even blurred as his eyes were, and in spite of the spasms of his body, he could see that, one and all, the aliens had reverted to crystal form. No light gleamed in them. They moved jerkily, as if having trouble even rising from the ground.

The sound in Dane's ears reached a new high note -- a note so clear and pure it ceased to be sound at all, to human ears. In its place came silence -- a taut, thin-strung, nerve-fraying silence that somehow was almost more than flesh and blood could bear.

Now, while Dane watched in the eerie silence, a Kalquois crystal suddenly cracked wide open in mid-air.

Its shards cracked, too; and its shards' shards. It was dust before it hit the ground.

On all sides, it was the same. Everywhere in the amphitheatre the aliens were shattering to atoms. In seconds, not one of them remained.

Convulsively, Dane twisted; managed to throw one anguished glance upward to the silver needle that was the Sandoz Shaft.

But so fast was the shaft vibrating that it now looked less like a needle than a flash of silver light.

Dane sagged back. Dully, he wondered how long it would take a man to die this way. Certainly there must be a limit to the amount of such maltreatment the human form could stand.

Yet he knew strength was not in him to break loose, tear away.

Was this, then, his destiny? Must he die here, a living conduit for the power now activating the Sandoz Shaft?

What a goal for a compulsion! What an end to a dream! He couldn't even see the spot where Nelva Guthrie lay . . .

Time blurred, after that. There were moments when he was conscious; more when he was not.

When he first heard the drone of the carrier's landing beam, he thought he was delirious.

Then he opened his eyes, and the craft hung there before him, less than fifty feet away. While he watched, it ramped down. The hatch opened.

It was then he *knew* he was delirious, for sure.

Because the first of the two men who climbed out was thick-bodied, bullet-headed, lump-faced, scowling Pfaff, the Security rep with whom he'd clashed.

And the gaunt figure behind Pfaff was that of the hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, hairless man, master of slaves, whom Dane knew

only as the Being-Without-A-Name!

CHAPTER IX

“**W**ELL, DANE, how does it feel to be the savior of your race?”

Slowly, painfully, Dane forced his eyes to focus and search for the speaker.

It turned out to be the hairless man. He sat on a crumbling stone bench, hunched forward slightly and with his teeth bared in a cold, knife-edged smile. Glowering Pfaff stood to his right, scrubbing a palm over a hairy forearm. To his left, a uniformed, strangely blank-faced stranger stood too stiffly at attention.

Dane moved his head a fraction, seeking Nelva.

She sat off away from the three men, still farther left. Her face wore a stiff, strained look, and she kept her eyes on a spot distant from the group, as if to avoid involvement with them.

Dane shifted his gaze back to the hairless man. He still said nothing.

“I do make a striking picture, don't I, Dane?” the other observed as if answering a question. His smile twisted mirthlessly. “If you'd like to try the effect yourself, a proper dose of some types of radia-

tion poisoning will do it. In my own case, the hair follicles were killed completely - - scalp, eyebrows, facial and body hair, everything. I felt rather bad about it at first, for I was vain enough in my younger days. But then I found that even the loveliest of women is more apt to be impressed by the unique, the different, than run-of-the-sex handsomeness; and no man ever forgets me. So there are adequate compensations. Personally, I'm quite satisfied."

The voice held the same twist as the smile - - a twist of bitterness, of irony, of lurking menace. It was the voice of a man who enjoyed playing cat-and-mouse . . . or forcing those in his power to confess their thralldom.

The very sound of it made Dane's hackles rise, in spite of all he'd been through. "Who are you?" he asked tightly.

"That's right; you don't know, do you?" The man leaned back a fraction. The lids of the deep-set eyes flickered. "We might make a sort of game of it, even - - let you guess - -"

"He's Thorburg Jessup." This, quite unexpectedly, from Nelva. Hate rasped in her words. Her eyes were smoldering.

"Thorburg Jessup - -!" Involuntarily, Dane's eyes widened. He pulled himself round; sat up.

"Oh! You're feeling better!" Jessup chuckled. "That pleases me. It would have been a pity to lose you, after all the effort I put into your creation."

Dane breathed in sharply. Then, catching himself, he counted off three deeper breaths before speaking: "And . . . what did you have to do with my creation?"

The Security chief lifted a long-fingered hand. "It was my idea. All of it, from the beginning."

"Your . . . idea - -?"

"Precisely. My biochemical staff in the Mercury laboratories is superrateative technically, but they need a broader, more incisive mind to shape their concepts. I gave them that - - outlined the exact requirements they'd have to meet in developing the type of creature we'd need to send against the Kalquoi."

"The type of *creature*?"

"Of course. You didn't think you were human, surely?"

Dane's throat drew so tight he couldn't answer. Numbly, he dug his fingers into the dirt of the arena, trying to hide their trembling.

Jessup watched him for a moment, then threw back his head and laughed - - jubilant, sadistic; the self-same laugh Dane had heard that other time, so many worlds away.

Only then, suddenly, Nelva

Guthrie was on her feet -- fists clenched, eyes blazing. "Stop it, you fiend!" she screamed. "Stop it! Stop it!"

Jessup's laugh cut off as if severed by a knife. "Oh, my dear! Have I disturbed you?" Mock solicitude flowed from him like oily vapor. "Really, I *did* have to handle it this way, though. I simply couldn't use a human. There was the matter of subconscious memory, inadvertent knowledge. You have to consider those things when you're dealing with telepaths like the Kalquoi, you know."

Beside the Security chief, pig-eyed, smirking Pfaff moved smoothly into the conversation: "You didn't have much time, either, Mr. Jessup."

"A vital factor," the hairless man nodded. And then, to Dane again: "As you may have guessed, the Kalquoi already had perfected a shield against the brain-drain. It was urgent for us to strike a strong blow at them before they seized the initiative. I decided the Sandoz Shaft, here, offered us our best opportunity. We'd already worked out a new-type catalytic relay that would activate it on practically no power. The only problem lay in coupling the relay to the shaft. To do it by normal procedure, with a task force, would have destroyed its whole value, because it

would have driven the Kalquoi from Callisto."

From Pfaff: "Brilliant analysis, Mr. Jessup!"

"So, I conceived the idea of an artificial man with the relay built in, made part of his tissue structure -- a creature something on the order of my guard, here" -- a gesture to the blank-faced man in uniform -- "but of a higher order. He'd be physically strong, well endowed with initiative. His mind would be good, too, and properly pre-stocked with all necessary information, as well as conditioned to a compulsive drive to reach Callisto and the Sandoz Shaft."

DANE SHUDDERED. Were these the things that dreams were made of -- conditioning, packaged data, concepts born in someone else's brain? Was he really one with the blank-faced guard -- "but of a higher order"?

He wished he'd died at the shaft's base.

Jessup was still talking: ". . . and as a special twist, we named you Clark Dane, after a John Dane who stayed on at Sandoz, long after everyone else had left, trying to learn more about Kalquoi culture. Because he'd established some slight communication with them, I thought his name might help you . . ."

Another piece of the puzzle, clicking into place. Another of Dane's questions answered.

"... like every life-form, the Kalquoi needs periods of quiescence. The yat-stick provides a closed circuit where a Kalquoi can rest with no escape of energy. So, you were left by a yat-stick experts assured me contained a Kalquoi in repose. I knew your name would arouse the creature's interest. Tie that to your drive to reach Callisto, and the odds were good you'd live to activate the shaft. If you didn't" - - a shrug - - "it didn't matter too much, because you lacked any knowledge detrimental to us."

Of a sudden, Dane was tired of words and explanations. He no longer cared about questions or their answers. Lurching to his feet, he stumbled past the Security chief, out of the arena.

Jessup eyed him curiously. "Where are you going?"

Dane continued his unsteady march. He didn't bother to answer.

Thick-bodied Pfaff moved round to block him. "Hey, you! Mr. Jessup asked you a question!"

Dane veered to pass him.

Belligerent, bullet-head down, Pfaff thrust a foot between Dane's. Dane tripped and fell.

Now Nelva Guthrie was running to him; kneeling beside him. Her

fingers were cool upon his face. "Let him alone, can't you?" she cried fiercely. "Haven't you done enough to him, without more of this torture?"

Jessup's smile faded just a little. "You've been a favorite of mine a long time, Nelva," he said in a too-quiet voice. "Don't jeopardize that status now."

The girl stared up at him, face tear-streaked. "Do you think I care about status at a time like this?"

"A dangerous question, my dear." The Security chief studied her for a long, long moment. "Now I find myself wondering if I can trust you further - - and no matter how I phrase it, the answer comes back, 'No'."

Dane felt Nelva's fingers stiffen on his cheek. A tremor ran through her.

Abruptly, his desire to leave the arena ebbed. He sat up. "What happens when you get no for an answer, Jessup?"

"*Mister* Jessup, you chitza!" Pfaff snarled. But the hairless man himself only smiled faintly.

"A wise man knows when not to talk, Dane," he observed. "For you, this is one of those times. You've done well. I like you. So human or not, I'll look after you so long as you behave."

"And Nelva?"

"She's no concern of yours,

Dane. And as I said once, a wise man knows when not to talk." A pause. "I may not repeat that again."

And from Nelva: "Please, Clark. Let it go."

Dane eyed her soberly. "Why?"

The panic flaring in her eyes was more than enough answer.

To no one in particular Dane said, "Everything that can happen to me has already happened. That gives me leeway to take care of a few things."

He started to rise.

Jessup's twisted smile was gone now. All gone. Sharp and hard, he rapped, "Get him, Pfaff!"

The squat Security rep whipped out a pelgun.

Dane went flat on the ground in the same instant. Clawing out, he caught Pfaff's ankle and jerked the leg from under the thick body.

Pfaff crashed to the ground. Twisting, he fired a pellet.

It went wild. Before the Security rep could trigger off a second shot, Dane swung up a ten-pound chunk of broken masonry in both hands and brained him with it.

Jessup's voice echoed, shouting to the guard. The man-creature raced towards Dane and Nelva.

WRENCHING THE PELGUN
from Pfaff's dead hand, Dane shot for his new attacker's knees.

The guard spilled headlong; lay moaning.

Pelgun at the ready, Dane swung to Jessup.

But the Security chief's voice stayed calm, even though his hairless skull was glistening. "You can't shoot, Dane. You can't." And then, forceful and vibrant: "Remember? I'm your master. You're my slave!"

Dane stopped in his tracks.

Deftly, while Dane stood as if paralyzed, Jessup took the pelgun. "You see, I'm still master, Dane. I created you. That's why you're going to stay here. You and Nelva Guthrie. Together. Dead."

Sweat came to Dane's forehead. In an agony of desperate tension, he tried to drag up his hand.

But it was like being thrown back through time into a nightmare. Once again, it was as on that other, dark-remembered day. The control, the conditioning -- they gripped him in spite of all his efforts; bound him tight.

"Can you guess why you two will die, Dane?" Jessup taunted. "Is there any reason you can see?"

Mumbling, Dane said, "Because . . . we know . . . too much?"

"That's right. But what about?"

"About the Kalquoi wanting peace? About the way you sent me to activate the shaft, so they'd think men were all against them?"

"Very good, Dane. Now tell me

why."

"Because you . . . run things . . . so long as there's trouble . . . with the Kalquoi. But if peace comes . . . you'll be just another man."

"Correct." Jessup's hairless face set in a death's-head grin. "And now, to get on to the business at hand . . ."

He moved towards Nelva. Face chalky with fear, she stumbled backward, behind Dane, out of his view.

Again Dane strained. Again he failed.

Was it true, then? Was he really Jessup's slave?

Numb, aching, he prayed for some power to break the deep-conditioned trance into which Jessup's cue-words had thrown him.

Behind him, then, Jessup said something too low to catch. A blow thudded.

Like an echo, Nelva screamed.

Dane never knew what happened in that moment.

Yet within him, it was as if some tight-confining band had snapped. The new stimulus overrode the old. Whirling, leaping over Nelva's crumpled form, Dane threw himself bodily at Jessup.

The Security chief's voice, half-choked, gasping the cue-words: "Dane! Remember! I'm your mas- -"

The voice cut off as Dane wrenched the hairless head back and jammed a hand down the yawning throat.

Jessup, arms flailing. Jessup, eyes bulging. Jessup, face purpling.

A final jerk, with every ounce of strength left in Dane's sagging muscles. The *crack* of bone snapping.

Jessup limp. Jessup dead.

Dane knelt beside Nelva. Hands shaking, he felt for her pulse.

Her eyes opened; grew tender. Slowly, she smiled. Her slim hand clasped his big one.

A shudder ran through him. Face averted, he pulled his hand from hers and drew back.

"Clark - -!" She caught at his elbow. "Dane, it's all right. I'm not hurt, not badly . . ."

Wordless, again he tried to pull away.

Nelva came close now; clung to him. "Clark, what is it? What's wrong? What have I done?"

Dane choked. "It's not you. It's me; what I am."

"What you are - -?" She tugged him around and stared at him, grey eyes ever so wide. "What are you, Clark?"

"You heard Jessup say it: I'm . . . not human." Miserably, Dane forced himself to meet her gaze. "Don't you understand, Nelva? I don't even dare to think about -- you and me. I'm - - different."

Like no one, not even Jessup's Zombie guards."

A moment of silence. A long, echoing moment, while the girl sat with eyes downcast.

Then, slowly, she looked up at Dane once more. "I know, Clark. Better than you. Because I've had longer to be lonely."

"To be lonely - - ?"

"Yes, Clark," Nelva's grey eyes suddenly were tear-filled, her voice a whisper. "You see, I was the

first -- the very first the lab made with a real mind, and free will. That was why I had to find you, even though I didn't dare tell you anything for fear I'd distort your reaction pattern, put you in danger." A smile, slow and shy, tremulous through the tears. "That's over now, Clark. We . . . don't have to be lonely any more . . ."

The pickup ship came much too soon.

THE END

**GAMES • JOKES
NOVELTIES**



"Gosh! I didn't think it was as big a surprise as all that!"

Secret Of The Painting

by

Robert Moore Williams

Many men would have killed to possess the painting—for Tom Calhoun knew it held a key to knowledge that would rock the scientific world!

“**H**OLD IT, BUDDY,” this fellow said, coming along the bar toward me. “I want to talk to you.”

The way he spoke set my teeth on edge. There was a whining, placating tone in his voice, but under this was a growl which indicated that if he had the chance, he would be glad to *order* me to stop and talk to him, instead of asking me. His clothes were expensive, but unpressed, and he was wearing them in a way that I didn’t like. There was another thing about him that I liked even less — the slight bulge under his left armpit.

All in all there was only one thing that I liked about him — the way his lower jaw stuck out ahead of the rest of his face. It was a perfect target for a left jab.

“You’re Luke Shaw, ain’t you?”

he asked.

“I am. And so what?” He looked me over carefully after I spoke. A faint flicker of grudging respect appeared on his face as his gaze crossed my shoulders. He measured me for a hidden gun, which he didn’t find because I wasn’t wearing it. He liked this. It made his job safer, if not easier.

“Look, Luke, I’m not trying to stir up any trouble.” The whining tone was back in his voice. “I just wanted to know — you work for Tom Calhoun, eh?”

I felt my back hair begin to raise as he mentioned Tom’s name. So far as I knew — and it was my business to know — Tom Calhoun didn’t have an enemy on Earth. He had me on his payroll for two reasons, the first being that I was the best friend he ever had, with the possible exception of Ann Briscoe, his laboratory assistant,



the second reason being that he knew he could trust me right down to his last chip. Sometimes it gets important to have one guy you can really trust. My job was to shoo away all curiosity seekers, who would invade his lab by the scores just to get a glimpse of the great

scientist, thus making certain that Tom got all the privacy he wanted, which was about all there was of this article. Also if the commies should come prying around, I was supposed to meet them and roll out the carpet edged in black. They had and I had.

Long Jaw didn't look like a commie, though in my experiences these birds never look like what they are but always like something else. The thing that makes them commies is inside, where it can't be seen, never outside.

"Whatever you've got on your mind, get it off," I said. As I spoke a couple of new customers came into the little saloon and lined up at the back bar. Ned Kenro, owner of the place and my good friend, went back to serve them.

"How would you like to make a couple of thousand bucks for yourself?"

His question staggered me. Two thousand dollars was a lot of money. "What do I have to do for it?" I asked.

"Give me the key to the back door of Calhoun's laboratory." Long Jaw said. As he spoke he watched my face. What he saw there, made him realize he had said too much. He reached for the gun inside his coat.

He was fast, I'll give him credit for that. But not fast enough.

Smack! My left jab caught him on the end of his protruding jaw, right on the button. He got his feet tangled up with the bar rail and went over backward. The gun, a nasty looking little .38, flew out of his hand. I reached to pick it up. This movement probably saved

my life.

A beer bottle came down across the left side of my head and struck my shoulder a numbing blow. As I went to the floor, the whole saloon seemed to turn upside down. Dazed, I tried to sit up and bring my eyes into focus. I couldn't see very well but what little I saw, I didn't like. The two joes who had lined up at the bar were coming toward me. They didn't intend to kiss me.

I turned around to look for the gun that Long Jaw had dropped. It was under the edge of the bar, out of reach. I tried to get to my feet. My legs had rubber in them. Meantime Long Jaw's two pals kept coming toward me.

Then the first one stopped coming. A stout length of hickory billy came over the bar and went home against the skull of the first one with a crack that was completely satisfying to me. I knew who was on the other end of that billy: Ned Kenro! Never in the years had he owned this little saloon, had he had to hit a man twice.

Nor did he have to hit this one the second time. The guy's eyes turned upward into his skull as if he was trying to look inside his cranium and see what had landed on his noggin. While he was trying to do this, he fell flat.

I got the gun into my fingers.

My eyes were back into focus. There had been two men. The second one had seen Ned go into action with the billy and he had also seen me get possession of the gun. He changed his mind and headed for the rear exit, fast. Ned Kenro vaulted over the bar and helped me to my feet.

"You hurt, Luke?" His round face beamed with concern.

"Not much, thanks to you."

"Don't mention it. Glad to do the same for a friend any day." He hesitated, his delicacy preventing him from intruding into what might be a private fight. "But would you mind telling me what this is all about? Watch it, Luke!" Ned's voice grew tight with alarm.

I TURNED. Long Jaw wasn't coming toward me. He was heading out the front door and he was in a hurry. I could have shot him, and perhaps I should have smoked him, but I hate to shoot a running man. I followed him outside just in time to see him jump into a car and roar away.

Perhaps I should have gone back into the saloon and kicked the truth out of the third man, but all I could think of at that moment was that Tom had to know about this. Yelling at Ned to take care of the third man, I jumped into my own car and burned rubber getting out to the edge of town

where the lab was located. A car was parked in the driveway and a man was coming out the door. Picking up Long Jaw's gun from the seat beside me, I braked to a stop.

"Who are you and what the hell ---" I got this far before I recognized him. Samuel Herker, president of the company that had been organized to develop Tom's inventions commercially. He had gotten rich off of Tom's discoveries, but his main ambition in life was to get richer. "Sorry, Mr. Herker," I called out.

He came across the drive to me. He was hot. "I want to tell you one thing, Shaw!" His voice grated like a dull file being drawn across tough metal. "Either this criminal expenditure of company funds comes to a stop or I'm going into court and ask for the appointment of a referee to conserve the assets of the company, then I'm going to ask for a lunacy hearing to determine if Calhoun is mentally fit to order equipment on company credit without my prior authorization!"

His feet kicked gravel as he stalked across the drive to his own car. The door slammed. The rear wheels spun as he jammed the accelerator to the floorboard. I headed into the lab.

Tom and Ann were there. Their heads close together, they were so

deeply engrossed in the papers spread all over the big lab table that they did not hear me enter. How many times had I come in and found them like this, deep in some problem? The sight always made me feel good. Here were two people who were doing their dead-level best to solve some of the problems that confront the human race. All day long and as far into the night as he wanted her, Ann was always in the lab with him, slipping away to steal a few hours of badly needed sleep so that she could return to work bright-eyed and eager the next morning. She was head over heels in love with Tom, and had been since the first day she came to work. So far as I had been able to see, he had never even discovered that she was a woman. A competent research worker, a thorough technician with a keen brain, yes; but a woman, no. He had not noticed that.

"Tom, I didn't want to interrupt, but I just met Herker outside —"

He looked up. A grin came over his face at the sight of me. "Would you like to see what Sam is so upset about?" Without waiting for an answer, he rose and moved to the back wall. New drapes had been hung there. With an expression on his face that said Earth's last secret was about to be revealed, he pulled the drapes aside.

I don't know what I was expecting, but I guess my jaw dropped. Behind the drapes was a painting, of a girl. Her features were even and regular, her eyes looked upward, and her face had a slightly oriental cast. What held my gaze was the haunting quality of her smile. Leonardo De Vinci had gotten something of this same haunting quality in the Mona Lisa. The girl in this painting smiled out at the world as if she knew everything that had ever been, or ever would be — and was laughing at the efforts of mere mortals to fathom her secret.

"I see it's getting you too," Tom said.

"It's a good job," I said. "But what is there about it to upset Herker?"

"The price I paid for it."

"What was that?"

"One hundred thousand dollars!"

I ROCKED BACK on my heels and whistled softly. At that moment, I was of the opinion that maybe Herker had something when he said Tom had gone nuts.

"Did you ever hear of the Dead Sea Scrolls?" Tom asked.

"Um. Yes. Manuscripts a couple of thousand years old that have been discovered near the Dead Sea in the last few years." I felt pleased that I knew the answer to his question. "But what do they

have to do with this, if anything?"

"This painting came from a sealed jar hidden inside a cave in the same region," Tom answered. "It was sold to a dealer in Egypt. I learned about it from a friend."

"So far so good," I said.

"You sound like Sam," he answered. "Honest, Luke, I'm not nuts." A strained expression crossed his face. "At least I don't think I am."

"To me, whatever you say is right," I said, loyally. "But what's the pitch on this painting? Why is it worth so much money?"

"Because there is a secret hidden in it," he answered. "And I'm trying to re-discover it."

"Ah?" I said.

"Luke, you mustn't think that science came into existence this generation," he said. "There were men ahead of us who were just as interested in solving Nature's secrets as we are. Some of them came close to doing it. I think the man who painted this girl was one of them. I think he hid his knowledge in this painting, hid it because he did not dare reveal it. It is my hope that if I can discover his secret and perhaps add it to the knowledge of modern science, I can come up with something that may be as startling as the atom bomb, only in a different way." He frowned and a far-away look crept into his eyes. I knew

he was dreaming of the future as he saw it, a better, healthier, happier world. He was just the man to make that dream come true!

"I've already uncovered part of the secret." He nodded toward the pages of paper on the big table. "Enough to know that the man who painted that picture was a real genius even if recorded history has no record of him! The geometry of the painting itself has meaning, the distance between the eyes, the angle of the chin, the way the hair is dressed ---" He went on at some length but I had stopped listening. I knew nothing of the more obscure aspects of cryptography but I knew enough to know that Tom could be right. I had never seen such a glow in his eyes or such an eager expression on his face during all the years I had known him. If he was dreaming, I hoped his dream came true.

I interrupted him long enough to tell him about the men in the saloon.

"You take care of all such intruders, Luke. That's your job," he told me.

Ann followed me outside, to ask further questions. "He had some visitors a few days ago, but I don't know who they were," she said.

"What do you think of this secret of the painting?" I asked.

"I think it's real," she answered, turning back toward the lab. Wist-

fully, I watched her go. Someday, maybe, I would be lucky enough to find a woman as loyal to me as Ann was to Tom. When this happened, I would notice that she existed! In the meantime, my job was to check the spacious grounds.

· *Wham!*

The length of garden hose with the lead in the end of it came at me from behind a wide hedge I was passing. I saw both it and the arm holding it, but I didn't see either soon enough. It came down across my skull with enough force to have addled an elephant. I saw constellations of stars as I went down.

I recovered consciousness with the thought in mind that dozens of smallsized devils were jabbing me with red-hot needles. Trying to move, I discovered the source of the devils. I had been tossed into the middle of the wide hedge and the thorns were sticking me. My hands were tied behind my back and my feet were pulled up behind me and tied to my hands. Also, the sun was rising. I could see the glow of dawn in the sky. I had been unconscious all night!

"If I ever catch that Long Jaw!" I thought.

Then I realized that the light I was seeing wasn't coming from the rising sun. The main building of the lab was on fire! Tom and Ann might be in there!

The cords that bound my hands snapped like so many threads as I hunched my shoulders. Putting my hands in front of my eyes, I rolled out of the hedge. Thorns tore at my flesh. I didn't care. I hit the ground with a jolt that rattled every bone in my body, then tore the cords from my feet.

SMOKE WAS POURING upward into the night sky. Off in the distance a siren was screaming. The police or the fire department, I couldn't tell which. Heat seared my face and I ran toward the lab. Looking inside, I saw a figure moving against the flames. Ann! As I stared, she went down. Pulling my coat over my face, I dived into the lab. Flames crackled in my ears. I sensed rather than felt my clothes begin to smoke. Ann stumbled to her feet and went down again. Reaching her side, I saw that she had been trying to drag Tom out of the building. The task had been beyond her strength.

One under each arm, I carried them out of the inferno. Most of Ann's clothes were gone, burned off. Her flesh, raw and red, was exposed.

"They --- they burst in. When Tom tried to stop them, they slugged him. They also hit me."

"They left both of you there after setting the lab on fire?"

"Yes. I think they hoped the

fire would cover up their theft."

"And that it would also cover up you and Tom." In my mind's eyes, I was thinking what I would do to Long Jaw if I ever caught him again. "What did they take?"

"The painting."

I didn't have time to wonder what there was about the painting that was valuable enough to justify murder and theft. Fire engines with bells clanging were screeching to a halt in the drive. Men in rubber coats began yanking hose from the truck. They worked as if they knew exactly what to do and how to do it. They also wanted to talk to me, but I didn't have time to tell them anything except that it was their fire from here on. Putting Tom and Ann into my car, I mashed the accelerator to the floorboard.

The doctor in the emergency receiving room of the hospital didn't waste any time on diagnosis. He took one look at the man I was carrying and a second look at the woman leaning on my arm, and went to work. He had Tom and Ann in separate rooms, with plasma and oxygen flowing into them, within minutes, and before I knew what was happening a nurse had thrown me out. I paced up and down the corridor for the two hours before I was able to get hold of Dr. Crane again.

"The woman has third degree

burns," he told me when I cornered him. "The man has only first degree. However, he has a slight brain concussion."

"Will they be all right?"

Down inside, he was a good joe. He didn't want to give me the news, so he put on his professional smile. Both of us knew he was lying. "We will do everything we can. The man will probably recover. As to the woman - - - "

"You've got to fix her up too, Doc," I begged him. "He doesn't know it, but he'll die without her."

I left the hospital with the memory of his professional smile lingering in my mind. It was a sad smile. It said that in the face of some conditions, even the doctors were helpless.

Reaching the lab, I found that the fire had been extinguished. A deputy sheriff was on guard, to protect the property, and - - - Herker was there.

"You're hired as a guard for this laboratory," Herker told me. "You're supposed to be on duty at all times, instead of out on all-night drunks. A lot of money went up in smoke because of your negligence. What do you have to say?"

I never wanted to clobber a man as much in my life, but I held my temper in check. I told him what had happened, and explained that the painting was gone.

"You utter fool! Don't you

know the company paid a hundred thousand dollars for that daub?"

"I don't care what it cost," I answered. "There's more at stake now than a damned painting, namely Ann's and Tom's life." I walked away from him then. If I had stayed any longer, I would have hit him.

Reports had to be made to the sheriff's office and to the insurance people. Since the lab was outside the city limits, we had a bona-fide sheriff. He was willing and honest and he promised to do everything he could to locate the thieves but both of us knew that this was locking the stable after the horse had been stolen. When I finished with the insurance people and reached my room, the phone was ringing. "To hell with it," I thought. Fatigue was on me in layers. The phone kept right on ringing. Prepared to blister the guy on the other end, I jerked it off the cradle. Tom's voice came over the wire.

"Come and get me," he said.

"What?" I gasped. "You won't be released from the hospital for days!"

"Come and get me," he answered. And hung up.

THERE WAS A FLURRY of nurses in Tom's room when I arrived. In addition, there were two big orderlies of the type and

size who are used when patients become obstinate. As soon as I entered the room, the orderlies measured me for size. I repaid the compliment and thought what a good time we were going to have. Tom, wearing a hospital nightgown and a dressing robe, his face almost covered with bandages, was on his feet. Dr. Crane, looking very serious, was present.

"Here's the man to drive me home," Tom said. "Bring me my bill."

Dr. Crane cupped his chin in his hands. "You ask me to accept a serious responsibility in discharging you when you are not ready."

"I agree with you," Tom said. "That's why I'm going home."

"Do you intend to resume your work?"

"I don't have any choice," Tom answered.

Dr. Crane's mouth became a knife line. Tom crooked his finger at me. I moved to his side. The two orderlies looked at me. I looked right back at them. Dr. Crane studied the situation. On the one hand, he didn't want a patient to leave before treatment was finished. On the other hand, by this time he had probably learned who Tom was. And on the third hand --- well, he could see that my shoulders were broad and that I was willing. Finally, he nodded his agreement. "With the proviso that

you will report back for treatment in case it becomes necessary."

Tom nodded as if he did not know he was lying. With the two orderlies looking very relieved, we left the hospital. "What about Ann?" I asked outside.

Tom shook his head. "Take me to the lab."

"But - - -"

"Shut up, Luke. I know what I'm doing."

I wish I could have said the same for myself.

In the lab, Tom surveyed ruefully the damage the fire and water had done. He stood for a long time staring at the spot on the wall where the painting had hung, then sighed and shook his head. I had the impression that he was sorry for the whole human race.

"I want you to pick up all the scraps of paper that were on the big table," he said. "It doesn't matter if they are scorched or soaked. Enough will remain for me to reassemble my own equations that I developed from the painting. Bring these to the old lab. Then I want you to make certain that I have all the black coffee on hand I can drink. Then - - -" He hesitated. "Do you think they will be back?" he said at last.

"I hope so," I said.

I collected the scraps of paper and took them to the old lab and set up an electric coffee maker that

would keep the black brew hot at all times. Digging a folding cot out of the basement, I put it across the door. Putting my gun within easy reach, I lay down on the cot. The last glimpse I had of Tom before I went to sleep, he was frowning at the pieces of paper on the table in front of him. With the bandages on his face, he looked like a mummy in grave clothes risen from the tomb to try to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, and not doing very well with the problem.

During the night I awakened. Tom was still at the table. When morning came, he was still there, but his head was beginning to droop. When I tried to coax him to take a turn on the cot, he glared at me as if I were crazy.

"I can't afford to sleep. Go get me some benzedrine."

From the drug store, I called the hospital. "Miss Briscoe is very low," Dr. Crane told me. "How is my other patient?"

"Alive," I answered. Returning to the lab with the benzedrine tablets, I didn't tell him about Ann. I spent the morning throwing out Herker and more inspectors from the insurance companies. I didn't want any of Long Jaw's pals to slip in under the pretense that they were insurance adjustors.

In the late afternoon Tom yelled, "I've got it, Luke. Here! Get these items for me." Hastily scrib-

bling what he wanted, he handed the slip of paper to me. "Burn up the road, Luke. Move!" I moved.

When I returned with the parts he wanted, he got busy assembling the weirdest-looking gadget I have ever seen. It seemed to be electronic in nature but it also seemed to include elements that started where electronics left off. All night long, he continued to work on it. Dozing on my cot, I awakened once to find him pacing the floor. "Uh-huh," I thought. "He hasn't got all the bugs out of it yet." Sometime during the night the unlisted phone rang. "What the hell?" I wondered, getting up to answer it. Nobody knew this number.

Dr. Crane was on the wire. "Miss Briscoe gave me this number," he said. "She asked me to call Mr. Calhoun and tell him that she needs him."

"I'll tell him," I said.

"You might also tell him that she can't possibly last out the night." Crane's dry objective voice went into quiet silence as he replaced the phone on its cradle.

TOM HADN'T HEARD the phone ring. I had to shake him to get his attention. When I told him what Crane had said, he nodded as if this was exactly what he had been expecting. "Okay, Luke, we'll go to her." He picked up the

breadboard' on which his gadget was mounted.

"What are you taking that with you for?" I demanded.

"Ann worked hard helping me solve the secret of the painting," he answered. "She deserves to see its first performance. Get yourself into over-drive, Luke."

At the hospital, a nurse took us directly to Ann's room. Lying on the bed, swathed in bandages, she was a mummy that did not move. Deep in sedation now, she did not know we were present. On the far side of her bed, whole blood was being dripped into her arm. Dr. Crane looked up from checking her pulse as we entered. "Everything we could do to give her strength has failed," he said.

"What about infection?" Tom asked.

The doctor gave him a sharp look as if to ask what he meant by hinting that infection could exist in a properly run hospital. "There is no serious infection. Her burns were so severe that she simply lacks the strength to rally." His voice was as grim as my thoughts.

Tom set his breadboard on the foot of the bed and ran an extension cord to an electric outlet.

"What do you have there?" Crane asked.

"A way to give her strength," Tom answered.

The doctor leaned back on his heels. He looked at the instrument, which certainly did not impress him, and started to shake his head. Then he looked at Tom. The head-shake turned into tightly clenched lips. "I am familiar with your reputation, Mr. Calhoun, but this - - -" The headshake came back.

"There was a first time for a hypodermic injection, a time when somebody first gave blood, a time when somebody took the first antibiotic," Tom said.

Dr. Crane hesitated. A struggle was going on within his mind. He moved to the bed and felt Ann's pulse. A thin trace of perspiration appeared on his forehead. "She's dying," he whispered. "Under any other circumstances, I would say no. But - - - Oh, hell, Mr. Calhoun, if you know a way to give her strength, go ahead."

Tom closed a switch. A soft hum came from the instrument. A cone that looked like a small transmitting antennae was mounted on the breadboard. Tom lined up the cone so that it pointed at Ann's body. He glanced at me. Sweat was visible on his face too. Without a word, I lit a cigarette and gave it to him. The sweat was very clear on his face now. Or was it tears?

"You knew all the time that Ann had no chance to get well?" I asked. "That's why you worked so hard, on this?"

"Yes," he answered. "It was a race against time. It still is." He turned his attention to his instruments.

I shut up. It got very still in that hospital room. In the corridor outside feet lisped on tip-toe as a nurse hurried on an errand of mercy. In the far distance a car hooted impatiently as somebody bucked for his place in the emergency receiving room. Dr. Crane stood without moving. His eyes went from Tom to the instrument, then on to Ann, then retraced their course. Tom closed another switch. A white radiation leaped from the cone. It touched Ann's body at the knees. Part of it seemed to dive through the bandages there and flow inward. The rest of it passed upward along the body, penetrating where it touched. It turned the bandages the color of old silver, well polished.

"What is that?" Dr. Crane asked. His voice was a taut whisper.

"The white light that you see is the visible component of invisible radiations," Tom answered. "It means my generator is not working properly. Otherwise, there would be nothing to see."

"Is this the bug you were worrying about?" I asked.

"Yes. I didn't have time to clean it up."

THE DOCTOR STEPPED forward and took Ann's wrist in his fingers. A startled expression appeared on his face. "Her pulse is getting stronger," he said.

"She is receiving energy, her whole body is being bathed in it," Tom said. "Seen from one viewpoint, energy is all that exists." His voice suddenly had the dry tones of a professor addressing a class in atomic physics. "Energy in motion at one rate of speed we call light. Energy whose motion has been slowed to a crawl, we call matter. The two are interchangeable. Even the human body, with all of its marvelous glands, its nervous system, and its wonderful brain, falls into the last category. If we could see our bodies as they actually exist, we would be aware of an infinite number of dancing points of light, the infinitesimally minute particles of energy that compose it." He paused. The doctor stood absolutely motionless. "So there is energy - - - and something else." Tom continued. His voice seemed to come from miles away.

"What is this something else?" the doctor asked.

"I call it *mind*," Tom answered. "It works with energy, directs it, and moulds it into a thousand different shapes and forms." His voice was soft with awe and reverence.

The doctor reached forward to check Ann's pulse. An exclamation of surprise came from his lips. He lifted her arm, then snapped on a light. His surprise grew greater. Snatching a pair of scissors, he cut swiftly through the bandages that swathed her arm.

"New flesh!" the doctor gasped. "Where there was only burned meat, now there is new flesh. And n--new skin!" A stutter appeared in the doctor's voice. A glaze came into his eyes. His chest heaved. "Medicine knows nothing like this." His voice was heavy with wonder.

"It knows something like this now," Tom said. "Remove the rest of the bandages."

The doctor's fingers shook as he applied the scissors. Her body was revealed. The burns had vanished. Instead there was the warm pink flesh of a child, built there by the energy flowing from the cone.

She stirred sleepily on the bed. "I have been having the most wonderful dream - - - that I have a new body."

Under heavy sedation, she knew nothing that had been going on. She thought she was having a dream. The three of us in that room knew how wonderful that dream really was.

Cool air breathed across my neck. I don't know how I knew what had happened but I knew. As I turned, my eyes confirmed my

hunch. The door was open. Three men were coming through it. Long Jaw was in the lead.

I hit with all my strength. The protruding jaw was within range. My fist landed full on the button with a thud that I felt all the way through my body. Never in my life had I hit a man that I enjoyed hitting as much. Long Jaw went over backwards.

I found myself looking at guns in the hands of the two men who were following him. "Get your hands up!" the first one said. Since I had no choice, I obeyed. As my hands went up, the second man stepped foward and slugged me in the pit of the stomach. As I doubled up from the pain, he hit me in the jaw.

At that moment, I would cheerfully have destroyed both of them with my bare hands. All I could do was glare at them. As I fell back against the wall, I saw that Dr. Crane was looking at them. Judging from the expression on his face, I think he would gladly have used his best surgical knives to cut their hearts out, if he had had the chance. He started to move. A gun swung to cover him. "Just stand pat, doc," he was advised.

Tom, at the foot of Ann's bed, did not even look around. His attention was completely engrossed in his gadget.

"You can't get away with this," I said. "This man is working on a project that is vital to national defense. The FBI will hound you to Siberia." I was bluffing and I knew it. So did they.

LONG JAW GOT SLOWLY to his feet. "Is that so?" he said. He moved toward Tom. "Come on. We want you - - - and your machine."

For the first time, Tom looked up. "I'll come with you in just a few minutes," he said, nodding toward Ann. "Her life is not quite out of danger yet."

"To hell with that," a new voice spoke from the doorway. "Get the machine - - - and the inventor."

I didn't have to turn to know that voice. Herker! He was standing in the doorway waving a bunch of papers.

"I always knew you had the makings of a crook," I said. "You at least, ought to have the sense to know that you can't get away with it."

"These men are in my employ." Herker waved his fingers toward the three. "I have a court order here empowering me to seize any and all company property in order to conserve the assets of the corporation." His face was very smug and self-assured. "It's all legal. There's nothing you can do about it."

I would have rocked back on my heels if the wall hadn't already been behind me. "What about Tom?" I finally managed to say. "Have you got a court order to seize him too, as a company asset?"

Herker fingered through his papers. "Yes," he said. "I have an order here empowering me to bring him before a lunacy commission."

For the first time, Tom looked up. "What you are really trying to say is that these men came to you and offered you more millions than you can count for my discovery and for the chance to force me to tell them how it works."

Herker acted as if somebody had slugged him in the throat. He gulped and tried to find words. "How - - - - how did you know?"

"They approached me first," Tom answered. "I refused to talk to them."

"But why? There's millions in it!" In all his life, he had never been able to see anything more important than a dollar.

"Enough of this," Long Jaw said, taking command of the situation. "We want you and your invention."

He moved toward the bed, but Tom held up his hand. "There on the bed you see proof of what this invention can do in the way of saving life. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Sure, sure," Long Jaw answered. "You'll be well taken care of. Just as soon as you demonstrate it to the big boys, your future will be safe."

"I'll demonstrate it now," Tom said.

He swung the cone so that the radiation from it would strike Long Jaw, then closed a switch.

A burst of blackness leaped from the cone. It struck Long Jaw. Instantly it seemed to flow over his body, engulfing him. I heard him scream, once, a sound that seemed to get farther and farther away.

Then the space he had occupied was empty.

Moving with the speed of light, the blackness leaped on to engulf the other two men. They went as Long Jaw had gone, into the blackness, swallowed up in an instant.

Herker dropped the papers. The black light hit him. He screamed and was gone into the darkness, gone instantly, gone forever.

The wall behind started to vanish as Tom cut the switch.

"The energy that heals can also destroy," Tom said. He turned the cone back to Ann and changed the switch again. Again the white light flowed out. I stepped forward and picked up the papers. The doctor, who had stood rooted to the floor, roused himself with a jerk. "I swear I saw four men come in here. Where did they go? What hap-

pened? Somebody tell me what happened!" His voice was rising.

"Perhaps your nerves are a little overstrained," Tom said, his voice very kind. "A mild sedative might help."

Without a word the doctor went from the room.

Tom switched off the light and moved to the edge of the bed. "Ann . . ." he whispered. "Ann . . ."

Even under sedation, she heard his voice. The smile that came over her face seemed to light the whole room.

I went outside and closed the door and stood guard over it. They had some things to talk about

which didn't need my presence, or they would have some things to talk about as soon as Ann regained consciousness and found that her dream was true.

In time the world of tomorrow would have something to talk about too, a secret that some scientist of the long-gone time almost found, and hid in a painting in the hope that in some future day some unborn genius would discover his secret again, and perfect it, and give it to the world. Awe was in me, at the wonders of the world in which I lived, and gratitude, that such men as Tom Calhoun inhabited it.



"Don't be squeamish, Smkbrdlyx, shake its hand."

Imagine walking up a street and having the sky literally burst open over your head; imagine invaders pouring down and you have --

Harwood's Vortex

by

Robert Silverberg

THE VORTEX BUBBLED up out of nowhere, hung shimmering in the air in front of me, glistened and gleamed brightly. There was a whirlpool of twisting currents in the air, and I wavered dizzily for a second or two while the Invaders poured through the newly-created gulf.

Then someone had me by the hand, someone was pulling me away. Leading me inside the house, behind a screen, safe from danger.

I didn't understand what had happened. I was numb with shock, half-blinded by the brightness. I felt Laura near me, and that was all I cared to think about.

After a couple of minutes, I opened my eyes. "What was that?" I asked weakly. "What happened?"

Two minutes before, I had been approaching the Harwood house, impatient to see Laura, untroubled by the world around me. And sud-

denly --

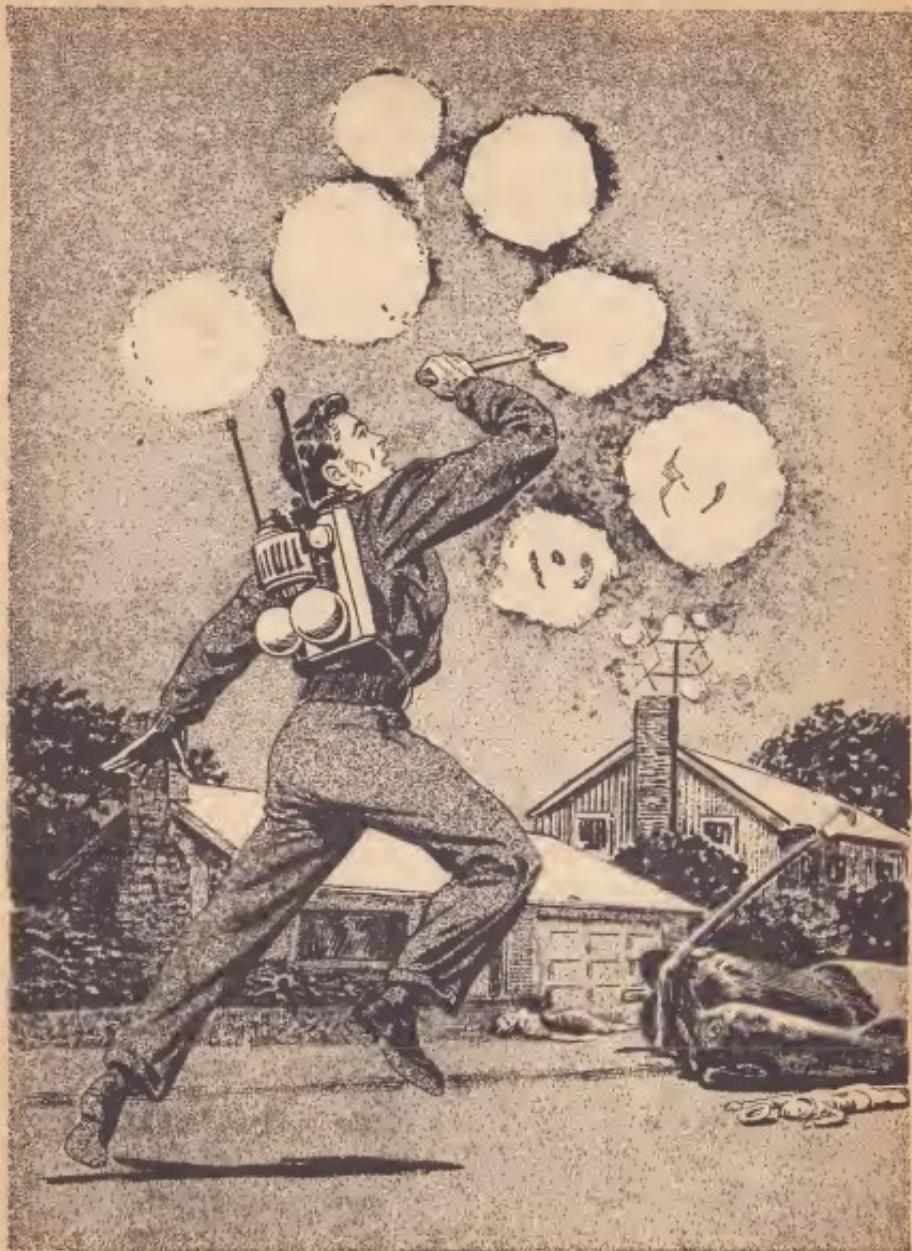
"It was Daddy's experiment," Laura half-sobbed. "It -- it worked!"

"The old crackpot," I said. "The dimensional gulf -- at last? I wouldn't believe it, if I hadn't nearly fallen into it!"

She nodded. "I saw you staggering around out there. I got out from just in time to -- to -- "

I held her tight against me, while she unloaded some of her anxiety. She sobbed for a minute or two, not trying to say anything. I looked uneasily out the window. Yes, it was still going on.

Right in front of Abel Harwood's house, the vortex was open -- and coming up through it were what we later knew as the Invaders. Globes of light, radiant and intangible, floating up out of nowhere and ringing themselves in the air like so many loathsome jellyfish.



"Why doesn't he close it?" I asked. "Those things are still coming through! Laura, where's your father?"

"I'm right here," said a cold, business-like voice from behind me. I turned and saw Abel Harwood's husky frame in the door. "What do you want of me?" Harwood asked.

"Do you see what's going on out there?"

He nodded. "So?"

"Those *things* out there -- what are they? What are you letting into the world, Harwood?"

"It's an experiment, young man." He crossed his arms over his dressing-gown. "Would you mind leaving my house, now?"

"Daddy!"

"You keep out of this, Laura." He turned to me. "I've asked you to leave my house. I don't want you meddling in my experiments any more."

I repressed an urge to aim a kick at his well-stuffed belly. Abel Harwood was a crackpot, a crazy amateur scientist who had been riding this other-dimension kick for years. Now, he'd let loose Lord knew what upon the world -- the things were still funnelling through the gateway -- and he was determined to see it continue.

"Harwood, you're playing with something too big for you! You're foolish and blind, and you -- "

"*You're* a trespasser," he interrupted. "I've ordered you out of my home twice, already. Will you go now -- or do I have to get my gun?"

"I'll go," I said. I broke loose from Laura and, with an uneasy look at the gateway outside, headed for the door.

"Wait, Dad -- you can't make him go outside in *that*!"

"Quiet, Laura."

She started to say something else, but I put my hand on her arm. "Never mind, Laura."

I opened the front door and stepped outside.

IT WAS HELLISH out there. The things had formed a circle around the vortex in the air and hung there, humming and crackling. The air was dry and strange-smelling.

I paused on the porch of the Harwood house for just a moment, tucked my head under my arm and ran -- ran as fast as my legs would go. I charged through the garden, carefully averting the vortex that had opened right in front of me, circled the nest of things buzzing in the air, and dashed down the street.

One of the creatures followed me a short distance, hovering a foot or two above my head. I watched it uneasily, dodged and ducked as it took swipes at me. It caught

me once, a grazing blow on the side of my scalp. I smelled burned hair, and felt as if I'd stuck my head up an electric socket. It drove low for another swipe.

And just then it began to rain.

The heavens opened and the water came pouring down and the sky was bright with lightning. And the globes went up to meet it. The one that had been tormenting me forgot me in an instant and went to join its fellows.

I stood there and watched them. They rose in a straight line -- there must have been a hundred of them by now -- climbing upwards, toward the black clouds overhead. The sky was split by a giant bolt of lightning, and I saw all hundred of them limned grotesquely against it, enlarged and given color by the lightning, *drinking* it. Then I started running again.

I kept on running until I was home, in my two-room flat near the University. I dove in, locked and bolted the door, threw off my soaking clothing. I grabbed for the phone and dialed the Harwood number.

"Hello?"

It was Laura's voice. I sighed in relief. It could have been old Abel, after all.

"Laura? This is Chuck."

Her voice dropped. "Daddy's right here. I can't talk very much."

"Tell me -- what the devil has

he done? You should have seen those things drinking up the lightning!"

"I did," she said. "I know what you mean."

"Is the gateway still open?"

"Yes. They're still coming through. Chuck, I -- I don't know what's going to happen. I -- no, Daddy!"

There was a sound of a little scuffle, and then the phone went dead. I stared at the silent receiver for a second, then let it thunk back on the cradle. I sat down on the edge of my bed and stared at my soggy socks for a long while.

Abel Harwood fit the classic description of a crackpot perfectly. My status as an authentic scientist -- if only an underpaid engineer -- gave me every right to make that statement.

I had been doing some experimental force-field work, and when I met Laura she told me her father would be interested in talking to me about my work. So I had dinner at their home one night, and started talking about my project -- and then old Harwood started talking about his.

It was some hodge-podge. Dimensional tubes, and force vortices, and subspace converters. A network of gadgetry in the basement that had taken twenty years and as many thousand dollars to build. A fantastic theory of bordering

dimensions and alien races. I listened as long as I could, then made the mistake of expressing my honest opinion.

Harwood looked at me a long time after I finished. Then he said, "Just like all the others. Very well, Mr. Matthews. Kindly don't pay us a second visit."

"If that's the way you want it," I told him. "But I *still* think it's cockeyed!"

And a month later, I still did. Only now there was this vortex in the street, spewing forth alien entities that drank radiation. Crackpot or not, Harwood had turned something on that might take some doing to turn off.

Outside, the storm was continuing. I snapped on my radio, listened to the crackling of static that was the only sound it produced. Were Harwood's pets blanketing the radio frequencies, I wondered, as I twiddled the dials? Were they drinking *them* too?

I'd know soon enough, I thought.

THAT WAS JUST the beginning, that night when the Invaders came storming out of Harwood's vortex. The next few days told of terror and panic, of retreat and the swift crumbling of civilization.

The Invaders, they were called. Thousands of them, wandering

around New York and the metropolitan area, devouring electricity, attacking people, bringing a reign of terror to the city.

The newspapers the second day said, in screaming two-inch headlines,

ALIEN BEINGS LOOSE HERE

The third day, there were no more newspapers. No one dared leave his home -- not with the Invaders at large. No newspapers, no radio, no television -- the channels of communication began to break down.

On the fourth day, armed forces from the rest of the country began to arrive. They combed the city, searching for the creatures. Bullets had no effect, though. They passed right through the bodies of the Invaders, splattered off buildings and lampposts as though there had been nothing in the way.

DAMN HARWOOD, I thought, as I stood at my window and watched the fruitless attempts to drive away the Invaders. All the time, I knew, that damnable vortex was still open, and more and more of them were pouring through every second.

It was funny, in a way, that the world should end this way. It *was* the end of the world, of course; we had no defense against them, and they burned and killed unstoppably. The streets were blockaded; we could go nowhere, see no one.

Communication was impossible; telephones were no longer working, ever since the Invaders had discovered what a juicy supply of radiation the coaxial cables provided. We were walled up with ourselves, waiting for the end.

As I paced my room impatiently, I thought of Laura, there with her father -- her father who had, unwittingly or otherwise, brought this destruction into the world. Then I looked around at my equipment, my partially-designed force-field generators. An idea struck me.

We were completely defenseless against the Invaders now. But maybe, if --

I worked through the night and on into the morning, soldering and reconnecting. I had only the barest shred of a plan, and that a mostly wishful one, but I had nothing else at all to do but work.

Finally morning came. Again there was the booming of guns from outside, as the army continued its attempts to drive out the Invaders. I glanced out the window and saw three of the translucent globes hovering over the charred body of a man in military uniform, and shuddered. I went back to my generator, and worked until hunger reminded me that there was no food left in the house.

This was the end, then. I was nowhere near the solution of my problem, and I knew I wouldn't be

able to work for long without food. I glanced outside again. The air was thick with the things; I didn't dare risk a break.

So I turned back to my generator and forced myself to keep working. I did. I worked far on into the afternoon, getting more and more tired -- until, sometime near nightfall, I fell asleep.

I slept. Suddenly, I was awakened by the simultaneous touch of a hand on my shoulder and clap of thunder outside. I looked up.

"Laura! What are you doing here?"

"I had to get away," she said. She was soaked to the skin, cold and shivering. She was wearing only a flimsy housecoat over some sort of pajamas. "Daddy wasn't looking, and I ran out of the house. I ran all the way."

"But how'd you get past the -- the -- ?"

"The Invaders?" She pointed outside. "There's a storm going on. They're all in the sky, drinking up the lightning again. They didn't bother me at all on the way over. Much better food available, I guess." She shivered again.

"Look, you've got to get out of that wet stuff." I told her. I threw her a towel and my bathrobe. "Here, get into this, and then we can talk."

"Okay."

She disappeared into my other

room, and returned a few minutes later, looking drier but just as pale and frightened. She peered inquisitively at the machine I had been building, then turned to me.

"Chuck -- Dad's out of his mind!"

"I've known that a long time," I said.

"No -- I don't mean *that* way. He's really insane, Chuck. You know that he's been in contact with these Invaders? That he deliberately brought them here!"

"No!"

She nodded. "He reached them through some short-wave transmitter of his, and made mental contact with them. They showed him how to build the Gateway -- and he let them through! They promised to give him the world, when they get through with it!"

I clenched my fists and stared angrily at the cloud-swept sky. "The madman! He was getting his revenge for the years people laughed at him, I guess. But -- what's to happen to us?"

"I don't know. The creatures won't harm him, and they're under orders not to touch me unless I leave his protection -- which I have. But as for you and the rest of the world, I don't think Daddy cares at all. Chuck, he's out of his head!"

"We've got to stop him," I said grimly. "We've got to close that

gateway and drive off the things he's let through. But how?"

"The generator's in his basement," Laura said. "If we could get in there and smash it, somehow, and --"

"How would we kill the Invaders that have already come through? There must be thousands of them!"

"We'll find some way, Chuck. There *must* be a way." I looked out the window. The rain was letting up, and there were only occasional flashes of lightning in the dark tormented-looking sky. "The Invaders will be coming back soon," I said. "Do you want to risk a dash over to your place to try to get at the generator?"

She nodded. "If we wait any longer, we won't be able to make it. But -- "

She gasped and pointed to the rear window. I turned, saw what she was trying to show me. Abel Harwood, hovering twenty feet off the ground, riding on a cloud of Invaders.

"COME OUT of there, Laura!"

His voice was somehow amplified and it seemed to shake my little room. Horror-stricken, we watched as the buzzing horrors bore Harwood closer and closer to my window. Laura shrank back against the wall and tried to flatten herself into invisibility. With a sudden nervous gesture I pushed

the table containing my unfinished generator into the closet, and turned to face Harwood.

He was right outside the window now. I saw the old man's staring eyes blazing at me, as he stood there astride two of the Invaders. They droned like defective neon signs, a horrifying slow buzz.

I picked up a heavy soldering iron and waited as they reached the window. Then Harwood reached out and contemptuously smashed the glass and stepped through - - stepped right off the backs of his hideous mounts and into my room. One of the Invaders entered also, squeezing its bulk through the window. There was a pungent odor of ozone in the air.

"Get back, Harwood. You can't have her," I said.

He laughed. "Who are you to give me orders? Come here, Laura."

Laura shrank back even further. I gripped the hot soldering iron tightly and sprang forward, plunging it into the Invader that hovered between me and Harwood. I stabbed again and again - - and it was like stabbing air. Finally Harwood made an impatient gesture, and the Invader glowed a brilliant red for an instant.

I dropped the soldering iron and clutched at my burned hand.

"For the last time, Laura - - will you come with me?"

"No! I hate you!" she shrieked.

Harwood frowned and started toward her. As he came past me, I grabbed him with my one good hand and tried to pull him back. I had thirty years on him, but my right hand was badly seared and he was no weakling even at his age. He shoved me away and sent me sprawling against the wall. I saw him grab Laura roughly. The alien hummed ominously above my head.

I made a mad dash for Harwood, caught him by the throat, started to squeeze. The humming sound grew louder, and then suddenly there was a blinding wave of heat sweeping through the apartment, and I fell back, clawing at the floor.

When I was able to open my eyes, a few minutes later, I dashed to the window just in time to see Harwood holding the struggling form of Laura and riding off into the night on the backs of his extra-dimensional Invaders.

I SAT DOWN heavily on the bed and stayed there for what might have been hours, recovering my strength. The Invader had given me just a glancing shock, just enough to stun me and singe my eyebrows - - and Harwood had grabbed Laura.

Now I *had* to find the answer. I had to close the gateway and

find some way of killing the Invaders -- and get Laura out of her father's clutches.

It was nearly morning by the time I shook off the last effects of my stunning and was able to think clearly again. I pulled my generator out of the closet and looked at it, wondering what needed to be done.

The gateway, first of all. It was a doorway to some alien dimension, Harwood had said. All right. I'd accept that at face value.

The Invaders -- what were they? Pure radiation? Energy-eaters? They were intangible, immaterial, but yet very much present. Perhaps, I thought wildly, their corporeal bodies were still in whatever dimension of infra-space they came from, and merely their essences, their *elans*, had come through?

Could be, I thought. And if it were true, I might have the answer.

Ignoring the fierce pangs of hunger shooting through me, I got back to work and concentrated steadily. The thought of Laura was with me always -- the image of her riding off in the sky with her father's arms locked tightly around her. Riding off as if kidnapped by a witch on a broomstick.

I don't know how long it took, but finally my generator was finished. Finished, and portable. I

strapped it to my back and picked up my longest and sharpest kitchen knife. I didn't have a gun, but it didn't matter. If my theory was correct, a knife would be just as good -- and if I were wrong, a gun wouldn't help anyway.

Then, without stopping to ponder, I ran downstairs and out into the street for the test.

Fresh air smelled good after days of being cooped up in my little apartment. I stood in the middle of the street and surveyed the wreckage.

Bodies lay everywhere, charred and lifeless. Overturned automobiles lay piled here and there, stalled trucks, artillery batteries and tanks. The defensive maneuver had failed, and what few people remained were in hiding. I stood alone in the middle of the street, the heavy generator on my back, and waved my kitchen-knife as triumphantly as if it were Excalibur.

"Come and get me," I yelled. "Come on Invaders. Let's see what you can do!"

I looked up. There were a few clusters of them, browsing idly around some television antennas atop a neighboring building. They ignored me for a few minutes; maybe they were so surprised to see a living human in the streets that they were unable to move. I shook my fists at them.

"Come down here where I can get at you!" I shouted.

They hovered uncertainly - - and then they came.

SIX OF THEM swooped down, humming and buzzing, glowing faintly and billowing in and out as they dropped toward me. I waited, waited until they were no more than three or four feet above my head, waited until I was dizzy with the strain and suspense and could wait no more.

Then I snapped on the generator.

It was like catching flies in molasses. The six aliens stopped dead in their tracks as my force-field spread-out around them, engulfed them, imprisoned them. Suddenly they were forced to contend with more radiation than they could possibly swallow. It pinned them there, nine feet above the ground.

I listened to their frenzied buzzing as they stretched themselves, elongated fantastically in an attempt to free themselves from the unexpected thing that had grabbed them. And then I stretched up on tiptoes and began to stab.

My knife flashed once, twice - - and the buzzing became an unbearable shriek. My heart surged as I struck home again and again. Now we had them! Now they were vulnerable!

Snared in the force-field, they no longer were able to flicker out of phase with our dimension every time a weapon approached. They were anchored now, mired in our continuum, helpless before my savage attack.

I kept stabbing until all six of them were torn and wounded, and then I snapped off the force-field. And - they were gone. Instantly, without lapse, they popped out of existence like so many snuffed flames.

Six down, I thought grimly. Six down, and untold thousands to go. But now we have a weapon.

I thumbed my power-pack and the field spread out around me. I began to cut my way through the streets to the Harwood house.

The aliens took notice of me, now. No more hovering around tv antennae; they clustered in the air, just outside range of my force-field, and chattered and buzzed for all they were worth. Every once in a while, one would blunder into my field, and a swift upward cut with the knife would take care of him. One cut. They were like balloons, and the first puncture did it. I didn't dare shut off the force-field to see if they'd pop out of existence, for fear the clouds of them in the air would swoop in on me before I could turn it on again - - but as I moved on, through the dead and

deserted streets, I could see the string of dead Invaders hanging in the air vanishing one by one as I moved out of range.

And then I was standing in front of Laura's home, right in front of the vortex itself. It was still there, and the aliens came thundering through at a rate of ten or twenty a minute.

I stepped past the vortex, ignoring the aliens that clustered around me, as helpless against me as humanity had been against them only a few hours before. There was no point in dealing with the Invaders yet -- not until the source was cut off.

I STRODE UP to the porch and peered in the window. I saw Laura huddled in a far corner of the sitting-room, and behind her Abel Harwood marching up and down, probably delivering a fiery parental harangue. It was a nightmare scene, with a dead city outside, hordes of alien invaders swarming in the air -- and the man responsible for it busy delivering a lecture to his unruly daughter!

I banged on the door.

"Come on out of there, Harwood!"

He looked up, astonished. I saw Laura's pale face brighten as she recognized me, then grow downcast as Harwood started to come

toward me.

I walked off the porch into the garden and waited there for him. He emerged, eyes blazing, and said, "How did you get here? How did you get past my guards?"

"Your guards don't worry me any more, Harwood. I'm going to put a stop to all this now!"

He chuckled. "You're a very troublesome young man, Mr. Matthews. I spared you once, for my daughter's sake -- but I'll have no such scruples this time." He gestured imperiously to the thick swarm of Invaders billowing out of the vortex.

"You don't scare me, Harwood." I drew a deep breath, reached around back, and cut off the force-field for the barest fraction of a second, then restored it. It was just enough time to trap twenty or so aliens in a glowing ring right above my head.

Smiling, I drew my trusty kitchen knife and began to lay about. I heard Harwood's flustered exclamations as, one by one, the imprisoned Invaders winked out, darkened, and died.

I finished off the twenty and folded my arms. "Care to send some more, Harwood? It's easier than swatting gnats!"

He sputtered a few unintelligible words, then rushed from the porch toward me.

He was a big man -- big, and

heavy. I was under the handicap of the heavy force-field generator, which I knew I had to keep from his grasp or else I was finished. All he had to do was to smash the generator, and I'd be roasted the next second.

Harwood barrelled into me, sweeping away the kitchen knife while I was still debating whether or not to use it. It went clattering into a pile of rocks in one corner of the garden, and then his fists hit me.

I backed away, making sure I kept the generator out of his reach, and flicked out a few defensive gestures. His face was contorted with rage. He was almost blind with fury, and I could hardly blame him. Here I stood, threatening to wreck whatever monument of villainy it was that he had been erecting for twenty years.

We closed in a tight clinch, and his fists pummelled my stomach. I drove upward and felt teeth splinter as I connected. He spat out a mouthful of blood and backed off.

"Why did you have to do it?" he muttered. "Why did you ruin everything?"

"You pitiful madman," I said. "For the sake of silly revenge on a world that rightfully regarded you as a crackpot, you - - "

His eyes blazed and he came

driving in at me again. In the background, I heard the continuing buzzing of the Invaders, who hovered out of reach of my force-field, unable to help their master. And overriding the dull droning of the aliens was a steady pattern of sobbing coming from the porch.

Laura. Watching her father and the man she loved fighting to the death in her front yard.

Harwood grasped me in a tight bear-hug, his thick fingers reaching for the power-pack on my back. I danced away and landed a solid punch in the midsection, and he countered with a wild roundhouse that staggered me and knocked me within a few inches of the garden fence.

He came lumbering after me, obviously determined to flatten me against the fence and crush the generator that way. I didn't have any way of escaping to the right or the left; I could only wait there and hope to withstand his assault.

As he drew near, I tensed my legs and crouched. Then he hit me, and I pushed upward with all my strength. The fate of a whole world - - and Laura and me - - depended on my strength at that instant.

It worked. His heavy body lifted, and he grunted in pain as I rammed upward. He went up, up, over the garden fence - -

And then, to my horror, he cleared the garden fence and, with a soul-splitting cry, fell into the gaping mouth of his own vortex!

I leaned against the fence, gaping -- and before I could think of what to do, the vortex was gone, winked out as if it had never been!

Then Laura was on the porch, white-faced, terrified.

"What happened? Where's Daddy?"

I ran to her side. "He's gone," I said. "Tripped and fell into the vortex, and then -- "

"Oh!" She gave a little cry and I thought she was going to faint, but she caught herself with an effort and straightened up. Speaking carefully, syllable by syllable, she said, "I -- just -- smashed -- Daddy's -- machinery."

"You what?"

"While you were fighting -- I ran down to the basement and wrecked everything. Everything!"

I shivered. No wonder the vortex had vanished. At the very instant Abel Harwood was tumbling into it, his daughter was

busily destroying the generator that operated it.

Her control broke. She burst into sobs and huddled in my arms. Finally she said, "I -- hated him. He was out of his mind."

"Try not to think about it," I told her. "Try to forget him. It's all over. There's just us now."

"I know," she said.

I looked up at the sky, which was dark with the Invaders. It was a frightening sight -- but I no longer feared them. The Gateway was closed, and Abel Harwood dead, so far as we were concerned. I didn't want to think of what might be happening to him in whatever universe he was in.

There would be a lot of work to do. I would have to find the authorities, if any were left, and show them how to build my generator. Then would begin the long, slow war of eradication against the remaining Invaders.

Laura was still sobbing. "Don't worry," I said soothingly. "It's all over now."

We had won.

THE END

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE:

THE SINISTER INVASION

by ALEXANDER BLADE

AN ACTION-PACKED NOVEL OF DEEP SPACE!
GET YOUR COPY IN ADVANCE—TURN TO PAGE 130 AND SUBSCRIBE



Helicopter Advances



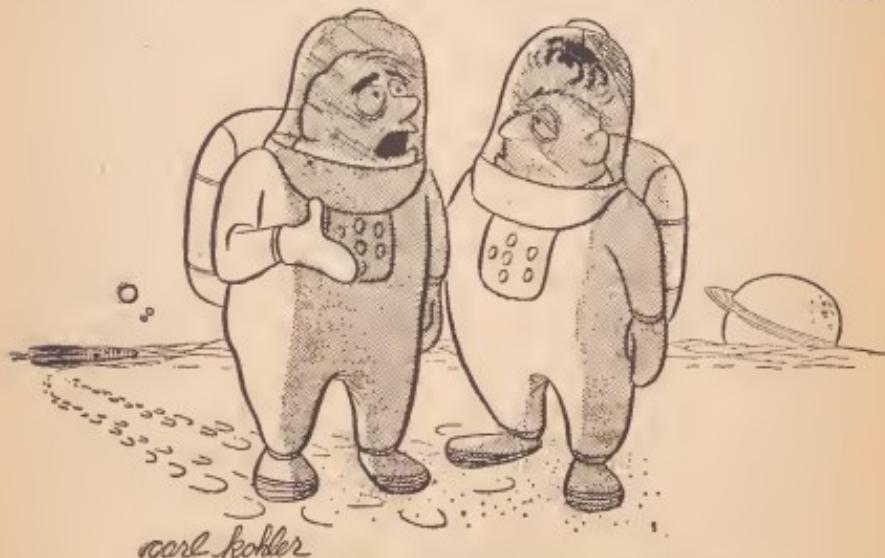
BELL Aircraft's offering of the "Businessman's Special," a three-place helicopter, suggests that the future of this highly-touted machine is bright indeed. Of course so much praise and anticipation deserve some realistic answers.

People say, "They build jets and rockets—why can't they make a helicopter—it's so simple." That is wrong. A helicopter may look simple, its flight may be deceptively smooth and airy, but as a mechanism, it is far from simple.

The "whirly-bird's" blades perform a series of controlled gyrations of astounding complexity

when viewed through the high speed camera's lens. You don't take a propellor and spin it in a horizontal plane to make a helicopter. The formidable mathematical analysis of the helicopter's blade motion would make your hair stand on end.

Bit by bit, the pieces are being put together and the stability of the machine improved. Right now, it takes eight arms and an ear to fly one. A session of helicopter flight is as exhausting as bear-wrestling. But with the advent of the blades driven by jets from the wing-tips it looks like everyman's 'copter is about near.



"Listen, I want you to stay calm, cool and collected — and run like hell for the ship!"



Conducted by Robert Bloch

SOME MONTHS AGO, while attending the New York Convention, I was approached by a number of fans. Some of them came up to me hoping that they would be snubbed and could complain about it in their fanzines. Some of them came to offer me criticism (most of which I managed to duck -- actually, I only lost two teeth). But by far the greatest number came to inquire just how I review fanzines.

At least I think they asked me *how*, although the word might have been *why*.

Really, of course, reviewing fanzines is a simple matter. If it wasn't simple, I couldn't do it.

The general procedure runs something like this. Every morning I hitch up the trailer, drive down to the local post-office, and load up the day's crop of magazines. Upon arriving at my house, the fanzines

are placed on the freight-elevator and taken to the second floor. Here a conveyor-belt runs them into my office, and a crew of workers sorts them according to size, shape, and general category of content.

After reading fanzines for a while, you'll notice that many of them easily fall into categories. Some of them easily fall into wastebaskets. (Actually I'm only kidding: I really have just two wastebaskets -- one for fanzines containing material by John Berry, and a smaller one for fanzines which don't).

But this business of categories is interesting. Time and again, I run across the same themes in articles and letters and review-columns.

Like, for instance, the critical theory that the trouble with science fiction writing today is that the authors are being overpaid. There

is a widespread notion on the part of many fans that the "sense of wonder" has vanished with the *Mc-a-word* rate: a belief that if you put the average individual in a garret to starve he'll start moaning with hunger, but if you put the average writer there, he'll start to turn out a masterpiece.

Now I don't know how it is with the average individual, because I've never met any, but I do know something about the average writer. And what I know tells me that this particular fanzine fancy, which I've read time and time again, is spurious. In the interests of better understanding and harmony between fans and pros, I'd like to discuss the matter. I could bore you with a long essay on the subject. Instead, I'm going to bore you with a long editorial. Which is called:

McGUFFEY'S FIRST
SCIENCE FICTION READER
OH SEE THE FUNNY MAN!
WHAT IS HIS NAME?

His name, dear children, is Roscoe Krochbinder. He is a writer of science fiction.

WHY DOES HE WEAR SUCH SHABBY CLOTHES?

Because he is a *fulltime* writer of science fiction. He does not pick up eating-money on the side as a movie projectionist, a television panelist, or a college instructor. He has no other source of income but writing.

CAN'T HE FIND HIMSELF A DECENT JOB?

Well, he tried to become a geek once. But the carnival boss told him he'd have to furnish his own chickens. Besides, he does not want

another job. He just wants to write science fiction for a living.

WHAT IS THE FUNNY MAN DOING?

Right now he has come from a four-hour session of research at the Public Library, where he has been checking material for one of his stories. He is hungry, so he is going into that restaurant to eat.

WHY IS THE WAITER GIVING HIM SUCH A DIRTY LOOK?

Because he only left him a quarter tip. The waiter, a Mr. Fleegle, generally averages about \$125 a week in tips.

IS HE A GOOD WAITER?

Well, you'll notice it took fifteen minutes for Roscoe Krochbinder to get waited on. And when he asked for rye toast he got whole-wheat and when he asked for black coffee the waiter brought him coffee with cream in it. You might say he was a pretty average sort of waiter. Nobody complains when a waiter makes a few simple mistakes like that.

WHERE IS MR. KROCHBINDER GOING NOW?

He is taking a bus back to his room to put in another four or five hours of actual writing.

WILL HIS STORY BE FINISHED THEN?

Probably not. He will write a first draft and then he will have to re-write it.

WHY DOESN'T HE SAVE TIME BY JUST WRITING THE SECOND DRAFT FIRST?

Ha ha, very funny. Just pay attention to the lesson, please.

LOOK AT MR. KROCHBINDER TALKING TO THE BUS

DRIVER. DOES HE KNOW HIM?

Indeed he does. The bus-driver, a Mr. Floogle, lives nearby. In a much nicer house, by the way. He drives the same bus on the same route at the same times every day. He likes to talk to people because most of the time he doesn't have much thinking to do on his job.

WHY DID MR. KROCHBINDER BUMP INTO THAT PASSENGER STANDING NEXT TO HIM IN THE BUS?

Because Mr. Krochbinder was thinking very hard. You see, he has to think hard about his stories in order to make sure that he can come up with some new ideas or twists in each one. That's part of his job.

SEE HOW MAD THE OTHER PASSENGER IS!

Well, kiddies, you can hardly blame him. His name is Mr. Fliggle and he has just come from the factory where he is employed as a sweeper. He earns \$2.10 an hour for sweeping up -- and with his time-and-a-half for overtime and his bonus, he makes about \$5200 a year. He likes the way the union protects him on his job, and he likes his two weeks' vacation with pay, and he likes the idea that the company shells out half of his Social Security and also gives him and his family free insurance. Also, if he gets laid off, he knows he will get Unemployment Compensation. But right now he is mad because he will not get another pay raise until the next round of automatic wage-increases after the steel strike.

THAT IS VERY INTERESTING ABOUT THE AUTOMATIC

WAGE-INCREASES. WILL MR. KROCHBINDER GET AN AUTOMATIC INCREASE TOO?

No, dear pupils. Mr. Krochbinder is a free-lance writer. He has no fixed salary or income. He has no union or pressure-group to represent him. He gets no pay when he takes a vacation. He must pony up every cent of his Social Security, and make out the long form on his Income Tax return, and do all of his own withholding. Nobody pays for his insurance, and when he retires no company gives him a pension or a bonus. Moreover, there is no such thing as Unemployment Compensation in his life. And as for automatic wage-increases based on a cost-of-living index -- hah! Unless he can sell his next story to one of the very few magazines paying top rates, he will send it to one of the other markets. And they will pay him *exactly the same word-rate they were paying writers in 1930, in the depths of the depression!* If, of course, he manages to sell his story at all.

WHAT IS MR. KROCHBINDER DOING NOW?

Sad to say, youngsters, he is walking into the liquor store. Before going home to his room he wants to purchase a pint of rubbing alcohol to put on his sore tonsils.

WHO IS THAT HANDSOME MAN WAITING ON HIM?

That is Mr. Fluggle, the proprietor of the liquor store. He is a neighborhood Big Wheel and clears about \$20,000 profit a year.

DOES HE MAKE THE LIQUOR HE SELLS IN HIS STORE?

No, he just buys it from a whole-

sale house and sells it at retail prices.

DOES HE HAVE TO WORK HARD TO SELL IT?

See how Mr. Krochbinder grabs at that bottle? No, dear students, his customers rush in and take it away from him.

DID HE HAVE TO STUDY TO LEARN HOW TO RUN A LIQUOR STORE?

Certainly not: he never got beyond eighth grade. An accountant handles his books, a stenographer writes his letters, a lawyer handles his business arrangements, the wholesale liquor salesmen provide him with advertising matter and even set up his merchandise for him.

DID MR. KROCHBINDER HAVE TO STUDY TO LEARN HOW TO WRITE?

Oh, a little. After he completed his education, he must have ploughed through hundreds of thousands of words before he acquired sufficient skill to sell his stories on a regular basis. He is still learning about writing, and he has to keep up with all sorts of things in order to find material for his yarns.

AND WHAT DID YOU SAY MR. KROCHBINDER EARNS A YEAR?

I didn't say, Nosey. But if you must know, last year his total income -- after expenses for supplies and deduction of his agent's commission -- was \$4,361.

NOT TOO GOOD, WAS IT?

Not too bad, either. Did you know that the over-all *average* income for writers in this country during the same period was only a

little over \$3300 for the year, according to an exhaustive survey? And this average includes the earnings of the few big-money men as well as thousands who earned less. OH WELL, MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING, IS IT?

That is so right, kiddies. And that is the lesson I want you all to take away from this little exercise. Mr. Krochbinder isn't writing just in hopes of getting rich. He is writing because he actually feels that this sort of work offers him the best outlet for creative satisfaction.

DON'T YOU THINK THESE PEOPLE SORT OF HAVE A SNEAKING ENVY OF MR. KROCHBINDER, EVEN IF THEY MAKE MORE MONEY AT THEIR OWN JOBS?

Well, children, that's a peculiar thing. It so happens that every one of these other men has read some of Mr. Krochbinder's stories at one time or another. I mean, Mr. Fleagle the sloppy waiter -- and Mr. Floogle who can drive his bus in his sleep -- and Mr. Fliggle who just sweeps up all day -- and Mr. Fluggle who holds out a bottle and takes a profit for wrapping it up. They have read Mr. Krochbinder's stories.

DO THEY LIKE MR. KROCHBINDER'S WORK?

More or less. But, you know something? Every one of them has the same complaint. They think Mr. Krochbinder makes too much money. TOO MUCH MONEY?

That's right. They figure if he only made less, then every story he turned out would be a master-

piece,
BUT IF THESE OTHER PEOPLE DON'T DO SUCH WONDERFUL WORK EVERY DAY ON THEIR JOBS, HOW CAN THEY EXPECT THAT EVERYTHING MR. KROCHBINDER WRITES SHOULD BE EXCEPTIONAL?

Because Mr. Krochbinder is a writer, and writers are supposed to be geniuses.

I DON'T THINK MR. KROCHBINDER IS A GENIUS. I THINK HE IS A DAMNED FOOL.

No comment.

SO THERE YOU HAVE IT. You may think Mr. Krochbinder is a damned fool, too, and realize that if he doesn't like his way of earning a living he is always welcome to change. But that is not the point in dispute: the dispute revolves around the twin notions that poverty somehow stimulates the production of superior material and that it is the duty of every writer to turn out a consistent flow of exceptional, original work.

In actual practice, poverty forces writers to resort to frantic hack-work, hastily slapped out to bolster a sagging income. Few writers in any way directly dependant upon literary efforts for an income can afford the time and effort necessary to produce masterpieces. The higher the rates, the better the over-all output. This is a fact which no writers, and few editors, ever dispute. And by what method of critical divination some fans have arrived at their conclusions it is difficult to determine. Perhaps they are thinking of a few exceptions which seem

to prove the rule -- Edgar Allan Poe, for example, or H. P. Lovecraft. But even here, it is possible to trace Poe's writing and ascribe the best of it to the periods when he was enjoying comparative prosperity: for example, the times when he was earning \$100 a week (a princely salary in the 1840's) as an editor. And Lovecraft's income from his stories was supplemented by a combination of scant private resources plus years of outright hacking and ghostwriting which undoubtedly prevented him from doing far better in his own fictional efforts.

So here is one of the standard themes running through fanzines which I submit is best abandoned, if fans themselves are really interested in better prozine yarns.

From time to time, perhaps, I'll consider some of the other attitudes prevalent in today's fan magazines. But right now it's high time to consider the magazines themselves.

First off, a brand-new first issue of **QUELLES HORREURS!!!** (2/Lt. David Jenrette, 47th Bomb Wing, APO 22, New York, N.Y.: irreg., 10c). Entire contents by Dave and trusty Rusty, who hold forth entertainingly on such matters as the Westercon (which they consider a bust) and some of the illustrations (which are busts I considered). Some of the opinions offered may be controversial, but all of them are stimulating: this is a promising first issue.

CRY OF THE NAMELESS (Wally Weber; Box 92, 920 3rd Ave., Seattle 4, Wash.: irreg.: 10c) is indeed a far cry from the above-

mentioned fanzine -- this August issue is number 94! CRY is the organ of the Seattle Nameless Ones, a fan organization which holds bi-monthly meetings at the Seattle YMCA, located at 4th and Marion. If you live anywhere around that section of the country, you might want to contact the group. If not, you can read the publication, which contains a well-balanced assortment of fan-fiction, commentary, reviews, and the usual letters. This particular issue features results of a poll of *Favorite STF Stories of All time*, plus critical ratings of current SF zines.

Also from the west coast comes the latest SCIENCE FICTION PARADE (Len J. Moffatt, 5969 Lanto St., Bell Gardens, Cal.: bi-monthly, no price). Ron Ellik takes over with a Nycon report and there are four departments featuring, respectively, books, prozines, films and fanzines on parade, plus a letter-column. I am struck with the simple, legible format of this magazine -- sharp reproduction makes reading it a pleasure.

Before leaving the coast, let's consider INNUENDO No. 77 (David Rike, Box 203, Rodeo, Calif.: irreg.: available on an exchange basis with other fan-publishers). Dave and Terry Carr have threatened to "combine" a variety of fannish publications and issue on a frequent schedule, and I for one would like to see them make good their threat if this is an example of what they propose. Here's another article on the Westercon, by Rike, supplemented by a page of Carr's Face Critters. Ron Bennett retaliates

with a report of the Kettering Convention, this one supplemented by Leslie C. Jefferson who adds comments. Then there's still another Continuation in the form of a story by Larry Stark, a host of letters, and an interlineation which reads, "There are 2,000 BNF's in California". I think this estimate is far too modest, myself.

ETHERLINE, out of Australia, has quite an editorial and production line-up, to say nothing of agents on the west coast, east coast, and in the United Kingdom. But we'll choose one name and that's (J. Ben Stark, 290 Kenyon Ave., Berkeley 4, Calif.: monthly; 13 for \$1). The issues I receive all feature an Author Story Listing, complete with photograph, a global roundup of science fiction news in all fields, and a comprehensive review section. Anyone familiar with Australian slang is undoubtedly impatiently awaiting the day when this magazine will start running interlineations. This will give somebody a chance to remark that "The Poo is Mightier Than the Cobber."

UMBRA (John Hitchcock, 300 E. University Pkwy., Baltimore 18, Md.: 7 times a year: 10c or 3/25c) is out with an announced new "loosening up" policy. Heading the issue is a thoughtful article on THE SENSE OF WONDER, by Andy Young: Jansen and Stark add offerings, and the usual letters and reviews round out the contents.

YANDRO (R. & J. Coulson, 407½ E. 6th St., No. Manchester, Ind.: monthly: 5c) brings back such regular contributions as Hal Annas, Gene DeWeese and Alan

Dodd, whose work is interspersed with the sprightly comments of the co-editors. The DeWeese film review is particularly charming.

As usual, John Berry is brightening up the fannish scene with his humor, some of which is to be found in VOID No. 8 (c/o Lt. Col. J. A. Benford, G-4 Sec. Hdqtr. V Corps, APO 79, New York, N.Y.; bi-monthly; 15c). Co-editors Jim and Greg Benford have given the magazine a distinctly English flavor in illustration and paper-choices and there's an Anglo angle to the contents, too.

TRIODE is a genuine Britizine, but if you wish a copy please note this address (Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, 22, Minn.: quarterly: 7 for \$1). The editors are Terry Jeeves and Eric Bentcliffe, and they can well stand up and take a bow for the current issue, which consists of 53 pages of Berry, Bramhall, Parr, Ted Carnell, etc., plus illos by Atom, Rotsler, Harry Turner and others. Plus another installment of Thomson's FUTURE HISTORY OF FANDOM, a transcript of the thrilling drama, LAST AND FIRST FEN, and a photo-page of the Kettering Convention. Here is a big, bonus-filled issue, and one for the files.

Last time around we accorded brief notice to GRUE (Dean A. Grennell, 402 Maple Avenue, Fond du Lac, Wis.: irreg.: 25c). The reason the notice was brief was because editor Grennell has been trying to cut down on his subscription-list and hence shunned publicity. I kindly offered to give his magazine

a good panning in these pages, but finally compromised with a mere mention.

However, the time has come to say a bit more about the latest GRUE, which LIFE magazine once designated as "The Peasant of American Fanzines." Perhaps the simplest way to describe it would be merely to list the current line-up. Cover by Rotsler . . . lead article by Jenrette . . . contributions by George Spencer, Es Cole, Chuck Harris, John Berry, and interior illos by Atom and Patterson and Bergeron, to say nothing of Dag. But the most important aspect of GRUE can be found in the contributions of its editor which range all the way from linos to a full-length rundown on pulps of the past -- this installment dealing with CAPTAIN SATAN. Everything about the magazine, including the lengthy letter-column and the immaculate reproduction, is on the fabulous side.

However, before the neo-fans rush off to drop their quarters into the nearest mailbox, a word of caution is in order. GRUE is a personalized fanzine. Like HY-PHEN, HODGE-PODGE, and the various Hoffmazines of the past, it is deliberately designed for the edification of an in-group. A sizeable and growing in-group, but a special circle, nonetheless; made up of people who correspond with one another, share mutual interests and make references to private jokes on occasion.

It is quite possible that a newcomer to fandom and to fan magazines may find a good deal of

GRUE incomprehensible at first reading. However, a perusal of two or three issues, together with a judicious or injudicious assimilation of other fanzines will soon familiarize the outsider with names and faces. After which GRUE grows on one. And the over-all editorial tone -- combining enthusiastic delight for the idiosyncracies of mankind and fankind, together with enthusiastic dislike for the idiocies of same -- has an appeal all its own.

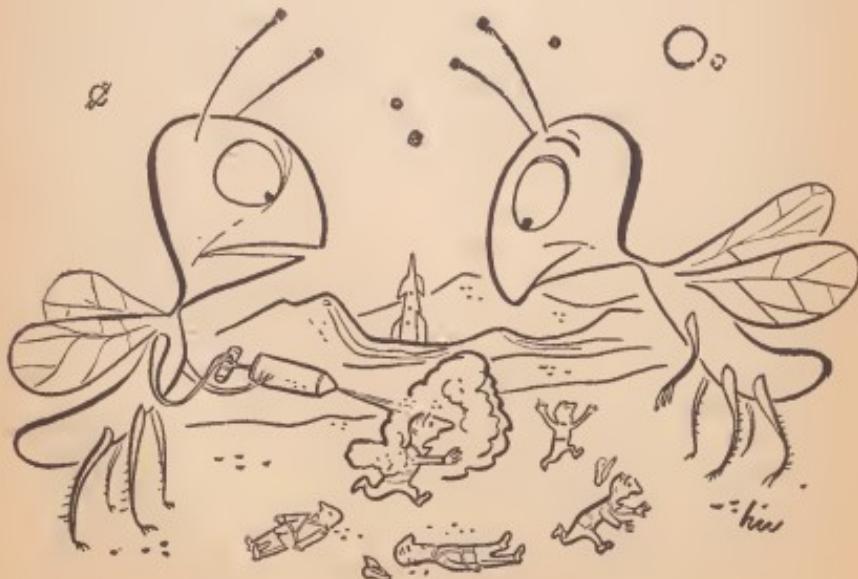
Promised, but too late for review here, are such up and coming attractions as the new SKYHOOK from Redd Boggs, the second edition of SCIENCE FICTION FIVE-

YEARLY from a Mrs. Shirley Shaw, and -- welcome news indeed! -- a revived PSYCHOTIC from Richard Geis.

These attractions, plus many others tentatively scheduled for early release, will do much to make 1957 a great year amongst fannish circles, to say nothing of fannish squares. And it probably means that the next installment of this column will be bulging with reviews.

Meanwhile, congratulations to the Aussie fans, who held their *Olympicon* in Melbourne in December, and to Petronius Arbiter, who produced a *Satyricon* in Rome some years ago.

—Robert Bloch



"I don't know what they are, but we're sure having a plague of them!"

Jon didn't know why he held a sword in his hand to fend off the Wild Ones; he knew only that he was one of many who for centuries had become—

Guardians Of The Tower

by

Randall Garrett

THAT MORNING, the sun rose bright and clear over the Tower. Jon woke, clambered to his feet, and rolled his sleeping-blanket. Within five minutes, he was fully awake and ready to protect the Tower against its enemies.

He took his station and stared out over the sea. Far in the distance, he could make out the bomb-blackened city; off to the left was the spot of green that indicated the village of the Free People. Somewhere beyond were the lands of the Wild Ones — the ones Jon was here to defend the tower against.

"All well to the East!" he cried, when his turn came. The other Guardsmen, stationed in a circle around the Tower, called off their observations in turn.

The morning passed slowly. A

little before noon, the man at the top of the Tower cried, "Enemy boat approaching! Prepare to defend the Tower!"

Jon's mouth tightened, and he squinted toward the dot of light on the sea that was the boat of the Wild Ones. Slowly, he drew his sword, whisked it through the air a few times, loosened his wrist. It was the first time in over a month that he had been called upon to do battle in the name of the Tower.

From within the Tower, the auxiliary guard-force came running out and took battle-stations. They stood ready, waiting for the Wild Ones to come.

* * *

No one knew what the Tower was. It had been there as long as any of the Free People could remember, and probably had been there forever. It was sacred to



them, and for that reason was under constant attack by their enemies from the Wild Places.

At twenty-three, Jon had been a Tower guard for nearly three years, had taken part in almost twenty defenses. The Wild Ones had practically captured the Tower twice, but each time the guardians had driven them off.

Now, they were back for another try. Jon waited tensely as they drew near.

Time passed slowly. Five minutes, ten, while the enemy attacking-party approached. The lookout at the top of the Tower sang out periodically, keeping the guards below informed of the boat's progress.

Finally: "They're here! Prepare to defend the Tower!"

The great sailing-ship pulled up on the shore, and men began to pour forth — ten, twenty, thirty men. It was a good-sized army. And Jon gasped when he saw who led them.

He was a giant, topping seven feet by several inches. His sword glittered in the sunlight as he slashed it savagely through the air, and his hair was a coarse, matted mane. He growled some barbaric command and the Wild Ones charged onward. The ring of defenders tightened and stood firm, waiting for the attack.

Swords rang. Jon found himself opposing a brawny youth with fierce, widely-set eyes and a good sword-hand. He parried a two-handed chop that could have cut him in half, and smashed back with a quick lunge that drew blood.

"Dog!" The Wild One flicked blood from the flesh wound and drove forward. Jon parried again, drove in, crashed his sword off the other's hilt. His hand numbed, the Wild One dropped his sword. Without hesitating, Jon cut the unarmed man down and turned to seek his next opponent.

He glanced over and saw Len, the Tower Captain, in tight combat with a gigantic Wild One. The

giant was driving Len back toward the sea with sweeping swings of his huge broadsword.

Jon turned and started to go to Len's assistance when another barbarian interposed himself. Jon whirled and leaped forward for the battle, just as he saw Len fall to the giant's sword.

"Give back! Give back!" someone yelled. "They're beating us!"

They're not beating me, Jon thought fiercely, as he laid open his opponent's arm with a savage slash and followed immediately with a quick swipe that ripped open the Wild One's throat.

Breathing hard, now, Jon turned to look for his next opponent. He had but one thought: the Tower must be defended. The Tower was sacred to the Free People; the Tower must be defended.

HE FOUND HIMSELF embroiled in another duel quickly enough. The barbarians seemed to be all over the place, cutting and slashing with their wild, untrained manner. A quick glance around told Jon that the Tower guards were being driven back; half a dozen of his childhood friends lay slain near him, and a river of blood trickled slowly through the grass.

The barbarians were falling too — but their giant leader was in-

domitable, was wreaking death right and left in the ranks of the Guardians.

Jon killed his opponent and looked around. The thick of the battle was on the other side of the Tower, he saw. It was now nearly noon, and the sun blazed brightly off the Tower's metal sides.

When he reached the other side of the Tower, he was surprised to see that barely half a dozen guards remained alive. Half a dozen, out of nearly forty.

He plunged into the fray with furious energy, cutting down three Wild Ones before they realized he was there. That narrowed the odds considerably.

Only three of the Free People remained — and four of the Wild Ones. It had been a bloody, fierce battle, with heavy loss of life on both sides.

Jon's sword plunged into a barbarian's throat, and in that instant the giant's weapon cut the life from the man at Jon's side. Two against three, now.

"Now!" Jon yelled and drove down against one of the remaining Wild Ones. His slash ripped open the man's leg, but before Jon could apply the finishing touch one of the other barbarians killed his man and lunged at Jon, who parried and dropped the man with a swift chop.

The realization hit him suddenly: *I'm all alone.*

And the gigantic Wild One was moving slowly toward him to finish off the last of the Tower guards.

Jon set his lips grimly. So the Tower would fall, after all, to the barbarians? *Not lightly*, he thought, and waited for the giant's advance.

The sword the giant swung was nearly four feet long. It cut a sizzling swath through the air as he approached.

Jon moved back, up against the comforting bulk of the Tower itself, and prepared to defend the Tower to the death. The giant charged.

Jon parried his wild blow, felt the stinging shock ripple up his arm as their swords clanged together. He initiated an assault of his own, but the Wild One laughed derisively and parried as if he were fighting a child.

"Ho, Free One! The Tower is ours!"

"Not yet," Jon said. "Not while I live!"

"How long will that be?" the giant asked. "Another minute perhaps?"

His sword spun through the air in a shining arc. Jon parried desperately, but the force of the blow was too great for him and his sword went flying out of his numbed hands. He stood there, helpless,

while the giant raised his sword for the final blow.

And suddenly six inches of bright steel protruded from the giant's chest. A red fountain of blood bubbled forth. The giant stared in amazement for a second, then began to topple like a felled oak.

Astonished, Jon looked up and saw the Wild One he had wounded standing there, holding a bloody sword.

"You . . . killed him!" Jon said incomprehendingly. "Why?"

The Wild One shook his head uncertainly. "I don't know," he said. "I — I suddenly realized he had to die."

Exhausted, Jon leaned against the Tower to support himself, and shook his head. "Why did you save me? The Tower was yours. Why?"

"I think I understand," the Wild One said slowly. He threw his sword to the ground. "It is something I have long thought of. We fight you because we hate you —

because we envy your free life. You have something to fight for, in this Tower. I — I want to join you. I want to join the Free People!"

Jon smiled. "You're welcome to come to our village with me," he said. "We believe in freedom — the way the Old Ones did."

"And the Tower? What is its meaning?"

Jon shrugged. "That we do not know, but we defend it because we think it is sacred to us — to freedom. An old legend, perhaps." He clapped the other on the back. "Come, friend. Let's signal the mainland that the battle is over and the Tower still in free hands."

He glanced up at the massive Tower, at the huge statue of the woman with her hand outraised, stretching a torch out over the harbor. "I suppose we'll never know what the Tower really was, to the Ancients. But to us — to us, it's a symbol of liberty."

THE END



Atomic Confusion



DATA and details are spewing from atomic laboratories in increasing multiplicity. Facts are piled on facts and the technical publications full of endless papers dealing with some small domain of atomic physics. This progress is

gratifying in a way but disturbing in another. Apparently there is no unifying concept behind all of it.

For example, literally dozens of different types of mesons are known and recognized on the photographic plates of the atomic physi-

cist. No longer do the simple proton, electron and neutron satisfy the equations.

Oppenheimer suggested recently that the most startling advances in all science are going to be made in atomic physics and that they are going to be of a theoretical nature—exactly what is needed. He implied that somewhere, some scientist, a genius of the caliber of Einstein perhaps, will detect an underlying pattern in the enormous var-

iety of atomic and nuclear physics.

This kind of thing has precedent. Before Max Planck and the Quantum Theory in the beginning of this century, no quantitative sense seemed detectable in physics. Then all was light! Similarly with Newton and of course Einstein.

Oppenheimer thinks that it will happen soon, this re-orientation in nuclear physics. It has to, because as physics stands now, all is confusion. Facts, but few explanations.



"They can't be so far advanced --
I don't see any TV antennas . . . "

THE OLD MAN

by

S. M. Tenneshaw



THE OLD MAN came down the ramp of the spaceship and stood at the edge of the landing field, just looking around. It was good to see Earth again. For a quarter of his lifetime, he'd seen Earth only in snatches, between space trips.

He stood there, one hand on the cold metal of the ship's catwalk, and looked at the field. It had been a night flight in from Callisto, and the field was brightly lit, sparkling sodium lamps and glittering constellations of guide-beams to illuminate the landing strip for pilots coming down. Bright light was necessary. It was a split-second job, landing a spaceship, calling for devilishly good reflexes. The Old Man looked at his own unshaking hands, and smiled proudly.

Then he picked up his duffel and started to walk across the field.

After about four steps, a gray-clad figure stepped out from behind a dolly and grinned at him.

"Hello there, Carter!"

"Hello there," the Old Man said amiably. But the blankness on his face told the other that the Old Man did not remember him.

"I'm Selwyn -- Jim Selwyn. Remember now?"

A smile crossed the Old Man's space-tanned, strain-lined face "Sure I do -- Lieutenant."

"Not any more." Selwyn said,

**Piloting a space ship called for nerves
of steel and an instantaneous set of reflexes;
in addition there was a tougher requirement . . .**

shaking his head. "I'm retired."

"Oh," the Old Man said.

He remembered Selwyn from the far-off past of his trainee days. Lieutenant James Selwyn had been one of the big men of the Space Patrol, and he had paid a visit to the Academy to talk to the new recruits -- one of whom had been the Old Man. The Old Man blushed a little for his younger self, as he remembered the blunt idol-worship with which he had approached Selwyn then.

And here was Selwyn now. Retired. A hasbeen.

"What are you doing these days?" the Old Man asked.

"Ground Mech. Can't get the feel of rockets out of my system, I guess. They retired me after one of my flights on the Pluto run. Guess I slowed down taking the turnover curve, or something. It's a good thing they spotted me before I had an accident."

"Yeah," the Old Man said. "Good thing. You got to have real good eyes to stay behind one of those big crates. Eyes and hands. The second your reflexes start to go, you gotta come out." Suddenly he glanced inquisitively at Selwyn. "Hey, Selwyn, tell me something."

"What?"

"You're not bitter about getting bounced -- getting retired, are you? I mean, it doesn't kill you to look at the ships going out and leaving you here?"

Selwyn chuckled. "Hell, no! Not any more. I kicked like hell when I first got my notice, but it wore off. I miss it, a little -- but I know my time was up when they yanked me. You remember Les Huddleston, don't you?"

The Old Man nodded grimly. Huddleston was one of the few who'd managed to fool them. He'd lasted past the usual retirement age, bluffed his way -- until the day he was taking up the Mars ship, and didn't quite have it. He was only a fifth of a second off in his coordination, but it cost a hundred lives and fifty million dollars. They kept an eye out for the Huddlestons, now.

"Have a good trip?" Selwyn asked.

The Old Man nodded. "Pretty good. I did the Callisto run. It's all frozen and blue ice out there. Not much to see."

For some reason, Selwyn's eyes looked misty. "Yeah. Not much to see. Just blue ice."

"That's all. But I made the trip okay. I'm due to take out the Neptune run this time around. Pretty good job."

"Neptune's an interesting place," Selwyn said, leaning on the dolly. "Venus was always my favorite, though. It's got -- "

Suddenly there was a crackle and the field PA system came to life. *"Flight Lieutenant Carter, please report to Administration Building at once. Flight Lieutenant Carter, please report to Administration Building at once. Thank you."*

"That's me," the Old Man said. "Guess I gotta go. They probably want to give me my new assignment, and they've got my paycheck for me. Pretty good paycheck, too."

Selwyn smiled and clapped the Old Man on the arm. "Good luck, Carter. Give 'em hell."

"Don't worry about me," the Old Man said. He picked up his duffel and started walking across the field to the big gleaming frosty-white dome of the Administration Building.

HE PASSED a couple of other pilots on the way -- green kids, right out of the academy, without the knowing look and air of competence that there was about a veteran pilot. They were running springily someplace, perhaps just working off excess energy before their next trip up -- or before

their first trip up.

"Hey there, Old Man!" they yelled, as they ran by. "How's things, Lieutenant?"

"Can't complain," the Old Man said, and kept walking.

He thought of Selwyn again. So that was what it was like to be washed up? You hung around the spacefield, pushing a dolly, tinkering with feedlines and hauling fuel. grateful to be allowed to smell spaceships and feel the rumble of takeoffs after your time was up. You watched the pilots who still had the eyes and the hands, and envied them.

The Old Man shook his head bitterly. It was sometimes a lousy business, running spaceships. The tests, for one thing. A test before you took off, a test when you landed. They gave him a test on Callisto, and they'd give him another one when he was ready to take out the Neptune run. They kept watch on you, all right.

"Hello, Lieutenant Carter. Have a good trip?"

It was Halvorsen, Base Medic. "Did all right, Doc. Nothing to gripe about."

"Be in to see me for a checkup soon, Lieutenant?"

"Soon enough," the Old Man said. "I'm taking the Neptune run, I hear." He grinned and kept walking.

After a few minutes more he was

at the door to the Administration Building, and the plastic door swung open as he walked up to it. A crisp-looking, efficient secretary came forward and flashed a row of white teeth at him.

"Good evening, Lieutenant Carter. Commander Jacobs would like to see you as soon as possible, Lieutenant."

"Tell him I'll be right in," the Old Man said. He walked over to the water cooler, took a long slug -- he couldn't risk drinking anything stronger, for fear of damaging his pilot's reflexes -- and headed for the panelled door that said on it D. L. JACOBS, Base Commander.

The Old Man paused for just a moment, adjusting his flight jacket, straightening his tie, squaring his shoulders. Then he rapped on the door.

"Yes?"

"Lieutenant Carter to see you, sir."

"Come right in, Lieutenant!"

The Old Man pushed open the door and walked in. Commander Jacobs stood stiffly behind his desk, looking very military and stern. The Old Man's arm snapped up in crisp salute, which the Commander returned.

"Have a seat, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, sir." The Old Man pulled out a chair and glanced expectantly at Jacobs. Jacobs was an old spaceman himself, the Old

Man knew. He wondered how come Selwyn had become a rocket mech and Jacobs a Base Commander, and then decided neither job was worth a damn next to that of being a space pilot.

Commander Jacobs fumbled in his desk drawer, took out a long brown envelope. At the sight of his paycheck, the Old Man grinned.

"How was your trip, Lieutenant?"

"Not bad at all, sir. I'll be filing the log later. It was a good trip, though."

"They *have* to be good trips, Lieutenant. Anything less is disastrous. You know that, of course."

"Of course, sir."

The Commander scowled and handed the Old Man the pay envelope. "Here's your pay for the flight just concluded, Lieutenant."

The Old Man took the envelope, slid it into his breast pocket, and looked up. The next item on the agenda was usually the flight assignment. Those came in thick green envelopes.

But Commander Jacobs shook his head. "Please open the pay envelope, Lieutenant. I want to make sure you read it now."

The Old Man frowned. "The pay computers haven't made a mistake yet, sir. I'd be willing to bet --"

"Open the envelope, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

THE OLD MAN RAN a finger-tip down the envelope, opened it, took out its contents. There was a neat blue check in there, and he put that aside. He looked at the amount briefly, then whistled.

Then he read the accompanying voucher.

"Carter, Lieutenant Raymond F.
"For Callisto tour, round-trip, at
usual rates: \$7,431.62

"Severance pay, \$10,000

"Total, \$17,431.62."

Numb, the Old Man looked up.
"Severance pay?" His voice was a harsh puzzled whisper. "But that means I'm -- I'm --"

Commander Jacobs nodded. "I'm afraid so. That test you took at Callisto --"

"But I passed that!"

"I know. But the indications are that you'd have failed the next one, Lieutenant. We're just avoiding an unpleasant and inevitable scene."

"So you're throwing me out?" the Old Man asked. The world seemed to spin around him. He should have expected it, but he hadn't.

"We're retiring you," Jacobs corrected.

"I still have some time left, though! Can't you let me take the one more flight to Neptune?"

"You're not a good risk," the Commander said bluntly. "Look here, Carter -- you know that a

pilot must be right up to peak, and nothing less than perfection will do. Well, you're not perfect any more. It happens to all of us."

"I'm still young, though."

"Young?" J a c o b s smiled. "Young? Nonsense, Carter. You're a veteran. They call you the Old Man, don't they? Look at those wrinkles around your eyes! You're *ancient*, as space pilots go. You're ready for the scrapheap. And I'm afraid we have to let you go. But there'll always be room for you here, some sort of ground job."

The Old Man swallowed hard, fighting to keep back the tears. The thought of Jim Selwyn struck him, and he knew he was like all the rest. There was no place in space travel for old men. You had to be young and fresh with trigger reflexes.

"Okay -- sir," he said hoarsely. "I won't fight any. I'll come around in a couple of days and talk over a ground job with you. When I'm feeling better."

"That's wise of you, Lieutenant. I'm glad you understand."

"Sure. Sure, I understand," the Old Man said. He picked up the paycheck and slid it into his pocket, saluted limply, and turned away. He walked outside, looking at the row of gleaming ships that sat there ready to spring toward the stars.

Not for me, he thought. Not any

more.

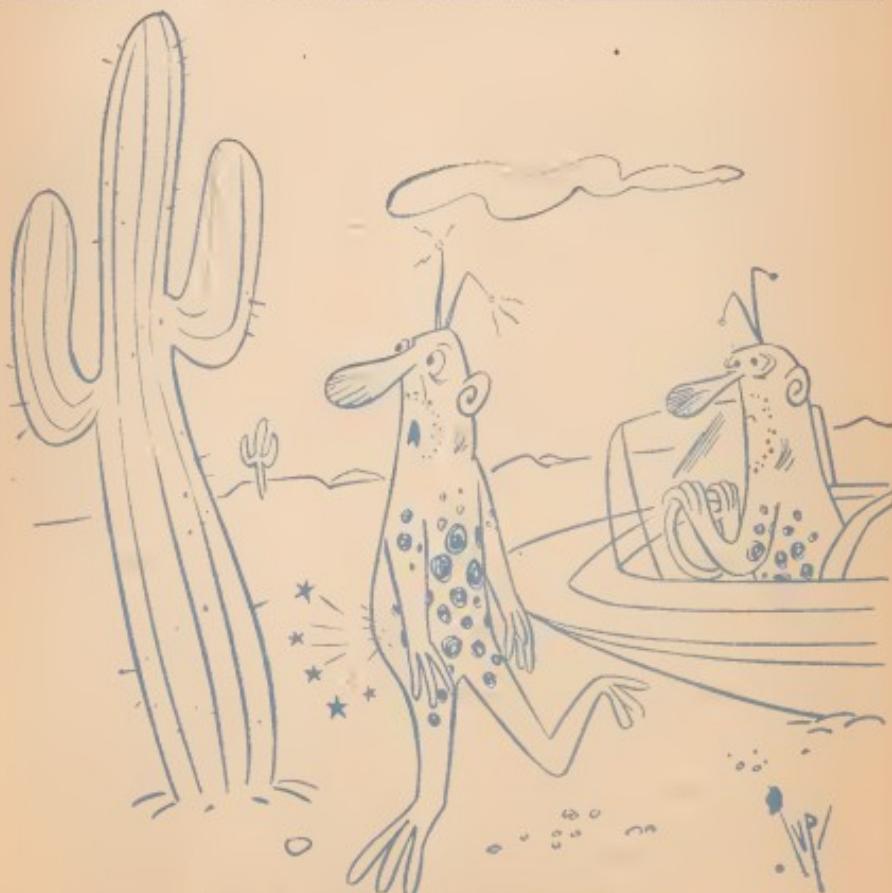
But he admitted to himself that Jacobs was right. Those last few flights had been pretty shaky, though he tried to deny it.

There was no sense hiding the fact any more. He waved to Jim Selwyn, and started to walk toward

him to tell him the news.

It was too bad, but it made sense. He was old, as space pilots went, and couldn't expect anything else but this. It had to happen some time. He was *ancient*, in fact.

Why, he was nearly twenty.



"Strange creatures these Earth people --
and they're not very friendly either!"

Fighting an alien champ was always risky business for an Earthman. So Filmore decided he might pick up a pointer or two before the big—

Slaughter On Dornel IV

by

Ivar Jorgensen

LARRY FILMORE STARED at his beer and mentally roasted his fight manager for the fiftieth time. Human beings were supposed to be the toughest race that the Galaxy had ever spawned, but as a fighter, Larry didn't put too much faith in the theory. He had fought a good many races throughout the Galaxy, and, although he had always come out the winner, he had plenty of scars to show for it.

He looked around the bar. It was full of various beings, none of them human except himself.

What am I doing here? he asked himself. *I'm sitting in a cheap little bar on Dornel IV, waiting for a Dornellian fighter to kill me tomorrow.*

But there was no way out of it, Filmore thought bitterly. Blackmer, his manager, had the whole thing sewed up. Larry had found

out, three months before, that Blackmer was cheating him — but that had been too late. According to the contract, Larry had to finish the season or go to prison. If he quit, he would, according to the law, be cheating his manager.

On the other hand, if he got killed during the battle, his entire check would go to Blackmer.

So Blackmer had done the smart thing — for him. He had lined up Larry with Fornax Kedrin, the champion of Dornel.

The Dornelians were big — eight feet high, with fingers that ended in razor-sharp claws. Of course, Larry would be provided with steel extensions on his fingers, but they wouldn't help much; Larry had never learned to use them. Fornax Kedrin would kill him in the first round.

Larry took another sip of his beer and stared forlornly at the

bar. With his fingers, he traced meaningless designs in the moisture left by the cold glass.

Maybe he was taking the coward's way out — but it was the only way he could see. Better a live coward, he thought, than a dead hero.

"Another beer, bartender," he called, finishing the one he held.

"Coming up, Earthman."

The beer arrived and he took a sip. Training? The hell with it, he thought happily. He was going to get himself completely stewed tonight. Live high, die young, and have a good-looking corpse.

Or maybe it would be better simply to get aboard a spaceship and try to get away. Maybe the Interstellar Police would never find him.

He shook his head dismally. That wouldn't work, either. Nothing would work.

If only he'd had some practice fighting a Dornellian!

He reached out for his beer, not noticing that someone had taken the vacant seat next to him. His elbow collided with a glass. The glass tipped, pouring a green, bubbling liquor all over the Dornellian sitting next to him.

"Stupid Earthman!" snapped the Dornellian contemptuously. "A clumsy beast like you shouldn't be allowed to enter a public



place!"

With one hairy paw, the Dornellian shoved against Larry's shoulder, intending to push him off the bar stool.

Larry moved back, more in astonishment than anything else. He hadn't known that Dornellians had any particular prejudice against Earthmen, but there was unmistakable racial hatred in the alien's voice. He put out his hand to the bar and stopped himself from falling off the stool.

"What's the idea of that?" Larry growled. "That was an accident, and —"

"Are you trying to argue with me? Here is the rest of the drink!" The Dornellian laughed and heaved the remaining contents of the glass in Larry's face.

A BLINDING TIDE of red fury washed over Larry. Without thinking, reacting purely by instinct, he lashed out at the Dornellian.

His fist didn't contact; it was blocked by the heavy forearm of his opponent. A hand raked out at Larry, a hand with six fingers, each of which was tipped with long, cutting talons. Larry moved his head aside barely in time. The talons raked across his cheek, drawing blood. If he hadn't ducked, the cut would have ripped his throat

open.

The Dornellian's other hand slashed out. Larry blocked it with his own arm and sent a hard left to the midsection of the eight-foot monster.

The Dornellian backed away, snarling. The fight was on for real, now. "Little Earthman, I'm going to kill you!"

He leaped in suddenly, and his fist smashed against Larry's face. Larry rolled with the blow, but it brought the taste of blood to his mouth.

His feet moving fast, the Earthman bobbed back away from the giant. He felt a glow of pleasure within himself. Here was his chance to practice a little with a Dornellian! What better training was there for a championship bout than a barroom brawl? He had to watch out for those claws though — those deadly razors that sprouted from the Dornellian's fingertips.

Two other Dornellians started to move in, but an Aldebaranian — a huge reptilian beast, slow-moving but powerful — stepped in front of them.

"Keep back," he hissed, in his snake-like voice. "This is a personal quarrel."

Larry heard an Arcturian spider-man click his mandibles together and whisper: "Yes, let the

Earthman fight it out by himself."

Larry wasn't too worried. He had fought to the death on half a hundred planets, and hadn't been killed yet. An ordinary Dornellian didn't bother him much. He moved in confidently for the knockout.

His fist lashed out, but his opponent was even faster. Larry connected with nothing but empty air, and the Dornellian's claws raked down his side as the other hand slammed against the side of his head.

Dazed, Larry danced back. His arm was dripping blood, and his head felt groggy and heavy.

The Dornellian threw a left jab, and Larry blocked it with his own left arm. But the giant had done something unexpected. Instead of striking with his closed fist, he had suddenly extended his fingers. The sharp claws stabbed deep into the muscle of the Earthman's forearm, sending a wave of pain to his shoulder.

Again Larry backed away, his arm aching from the wounds. Quickly, he reversed his direction and stepped back in. This time, he used a kick but the Dornellian sidestepped. The toe of Larry's boot caught his hip. Cursing, the Dornellian closed in.

He punched a hand forward, claws extended. Larry stepped to one side and grabbed the hairy

wrist. Using the giant's strength and weight to his own advantage, he propelled the monster across the room, slamming him up against the bar. Then he leaped forward to smash in the Dornellian's ribcage with his heavy boots.

He was not quick enough. The giant rolled aside and sprang to his feet. Snarling viciously, he advanced toward the Earthman.

One hand came down in a hard, chopping blow. Larry managed to fend it off, but the Dornellian's other hand slugged into the pit of his stomach.

Weak with pain, Larry staggered back. He aimed a kick at the alien's shin, and it connected hard. Taking advantage of his opportunity, Larry stepped in. His heel came down on the Dornellian's toes at the same time that his fist slammed into the bristly jaw.

The giant reeled backwards, his taloned hand slashing through the air. He regained his balance and came forward again, but this time Larry was ready for him.

The Dornellian stepped square into a blow to the stomach.

Oddly enough, it didn't seem to bother him much. Then Larry remembered that the Dornellian nervous system wasn't much like an Earthman's; the nerves just weren't in the same places.

But where were they? Again

he cursed Blackmer. The manager hadn't told him anything about Dornellians, had let him sign for the fight with Fornax Kedrin even though it would be sheer murder.

Well, Larry thought somberly, I'll learn tonight. If I ever get out of this bar alive.

HE TOOK A DEEP breath and glanced at the giant, who had recovered from Larry's onslaught. The Dornelian stepped in with a fast one-two — a rake across the face with his left and a smash to the heart with his right.

The claws to his face alerted Larry for the blow to the heart; he stepped back just enough to avoid being really hurt. But the Dornelian's talons had raked his forehead, cutting in deeply. Blood was pouring down over his eyes.

He took a quick look around the bar. The customers were gathered in a ring and were watching the contest wide-eyed, as if they were in fifty-credit ringside seats.

The Dornelian still looked relatively unscratched, while Larry knew he looked as though he'd rolled over a barbed-wire fence. But in spite of the blood, Larry had finally gotten the measure of his opponent. The eight-foot giant weighed close to five hundred pounds; his mass was too great for him to be able to handle his

body rapidly, no matter how fast his reflexes were.

Larry moved in again. He planted a hard right directly in the giant's throat — there *had* to be nerves there. The Dornelian gagged and dropped his head. Larry smiled and slammed his fist into the giant's rib cage, doubling him up even more. He could almost hear the crowd cheering now as he moved in for the kill.

He sucked in his breath and lifted one from the floor. His right fist came up from his knees, gaining speed as it rose. Like a hammer, it crashed into the hairy jaw of the Dornelian, and Larry could feel bone splintering against his knuckles.

Like an oak with rotten roots, the great Dornelian toppled to the floor. He landed with a crash that seemed to shake the building.

Larry stood over the fallen giant for a moment, catching his breath, wondering when the referee was going to start the count. Then he realized there wasn't going to be any count. There wasn't any referee.

His arms were quivering, and his face was dripping with blood. He turned away, mopping his face clean, and started to pick up his unfinished beer when the wailing of sirens echoed through the bar.

Police! Someone had called the

Dornellian police!

The Arcturian spider-man sidled up to him. "Well done, Earthman," he said in his whispering voice. "Come with me; I have a car outside." Without another word, the Arcturian scuttled toward the door.

Larry paused for a fraction of a second before making up his mind. As well trust the Arcturian as anyone; if the police caught him, his life wouldn't be worth a counterfeit credit.

No one tried to stop him as he ran out the door.

The Arcturian's car was waiting just outside. Larry climbed in, and the spider-man slammed one of his many feet down on the accelerator. The car shot off into the night, its turboelectric engine humming smoothly.

"Well, Earthman," said the grating, whispering voice, "You made hash out of the Dornellian. Frankly, I was surprised."

"So was I," Larry said. "I don't know why I'm bothering to run away. All they'll have to do is pick me up at my hotel."

The Arcturian chuckled dryly. "No. I don't think anyone recognized you. Don't forget that all Earthmen look alike to other beings. The only reason I knew who you were is that I'm a fan of yours. I was glad to see you beat that

Dornellian, believe me."

"Thanks," Larry said. "But it's not going to do me any good when I get into the ring against Fornax Kedrin. If an ordinary Dornellian citizen puts up a fight like that, what am I going to do against a professional boxer?"

The Arcturian laughed again. "Just get in there and fight, Filmore. You can handle him. I'm sure you can."

THE CAR PULLED up before the hotel where Larry and his manager were staying, and Larry got out. The Arcturian waved to him and drove off.

Wearily, Larry dragged himself inside and into the elevator.

"Seventeen, please."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Filmore," said the Dornellian elevator boy.

He pushed open the door to his room and dropped on the bed, dead tired. He didn't dare look in the mirror; he was afraid to see what a mess the Dornellian had made out of his face, which hadn't been any too neat before.

"Blackmer?" he called.

There was no answer. The manager was not around. Larry got up, looked bleary-eyed into the other room, and, seeing no one, dropped off into a deep sleep. His last thought before he blacked out was that he'd get into the ring

and do his best. He'd already beaten *one* Dornellian; how tough could Fornax Kedrin be? And what did it matter anyway? He was bound to get killed sooner or later anyway. That was the unspoken assumption every fighter operated under.

When he awoke the following morning, he didn't feel quite so certain about things. The brawl the night before had taken a terrific toll on his nervous system, and he knew that he'd be butchered if he stepped into the ring with the Dornellian champ. He was in no condition to fight.

"Blackmer? You here?"

The manager's bed had been slept in, but there was no sign of him. Larry groped for the house phone, grabbed it, spoke into it. "Do you know where Mr. Blackmer is?"

"He's in the bar, sir," said the switchboard boy. "Do you want me to call him for you?"

"Yes, please."

A moment later, Larry heard the manager's harsh voice. "Black-

mer here. Who's calling?"

"This is Larry. I'm ready for that fight, Blackmer," he said, hoping he'd have the strength to go through with it. "And after I get through with the Dornellian, I'm going to knock your teeth in. This is my last fight for you."

"Now Larry," Blackmer said. "Don't be hasty. I — "

"Shut up! We're quits! I may get killed in that ring, but I'll fight just this once and — "

"What? Haven't you heard? The fight's off!"

Larry blinked in astonishment. "How would I have heard?"

"I thought the news was all over. That's why I didn't bother to wake you. Fornax Kedrin is in the hospital. He got his jaw broken in a bar brawl last night. Nobody knows who did it. But I got another bout lined up on Domerang VI with — "

"Skip it," Larry said. "I'll discuss it with you some other time."

Larry slowly dropped the receiver back on the hook. He grinned. And then he began to laugh.

★ *To Overcome Gravity* ★

ALTHOUGH gravity is the commonest experience, both scientific and ordinary, it is of course, the least understood. Einstein's presentation of gravity as a property

of space, while a tremendous advance, still is of no avail when it comes to grappling with gravity in engineering terms.

That it is possible—perhaps—to

do something about gravity, has been recognized by even so mundane and matter-of-fact an organization as an aircraft firm. One of the biggest manufacturers of aircraft in the United States has set up a high pressure program, the purpose of which is to delve into the nature of this mysterious "force."

Their hope is to do something about gravity "from the inside" so to speak. At present the only way to overcome it is by doing work against it, doing work in the most direct way, that is, by exerting a force or thrust upwards. That this force comes from a pulley rope, a lever or a rocket motor is irrelevant.

It is still the familiar work of a force through a distance, no different in principle than the Archimedean lever.

What is needed is some way of doing the work directly. Obviously gravity can be neutralized only by work. But if this work could be in the form of an electric or a magnetic field, that would be progress. It is the hope of the aircraft firm to find a way to do this.

Notice that ridiculous "gravity-neutralizers" such as H. G. Wells' "Cavorite" are not suggested. Science expects to expend energy, not get it for nothing as Wells did!



"Captain . . . I'd like you to take a look at this."



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NAVAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Edward L. Gilroy: P.O. Box 754,
Fruitland Park, Fla.

Age 65. "I am now retired from my active profession as a naval photographer. I read plenty, write a little, paint — do black & white and color slides, grow miniature trees and make wood inlay pictures. Will welcome correspondence as I now have plenty of leisure time."

SALESMAN

Robert Kinnear: 1202 Nevada St., Apt. 1, Toledo 5, Ohio.

Age 26. "I'm still single, and interested in many things: photography, anthropology, languages, especially philology, and at present am working on a new system to simplify the English alphabet. Other interests include hunting, creative writing, and people and places. Would like to hear from people all

over the world."

JOURNALISM MAJOR

Lee Hamilton: 308 W. 15th St., Lumberton, N.C.

Age 25: "I'm male, and a junior in college, majoring in journalism with minor in psychology. I'm interested in all phases of natural sciences, especially astro-physics, and astronomy. I'm very interested in hearing from others in science fiction to get to know their ideas of all facets of the medium whether it be 'hyper space' or the hidden mysteries of the human brain. Would be a pleasure to get to know all the guys and gals who love stf as I do."

RECENT GRADUATE

Dorothy Silva: 8 Atlantic Ave., Providence 7, R.I.

Age 18: "I'm five feet eight,

brown hair and eyes, and plan to start office work soon. Have been reading science fiction for five years now, and love it. I'm also interested in ballet, classical music, and collect stamps, ballet pictures, and material on ancient history. I'd especially like to hear from those overseas."

GIFT SHOP OWNER

Rodney Leshner: 3521 Ridgeway St., Laureldale, Pa.

Age 25: "I have been bed-ridden with arthritis for the past eight years, so correspondence is quite important to me. I'm single, play a good game of chess, am interested in creative writing, and build model airplanes. I operate my own gift shop. Would especially like to hear from girls my age interested in science fiction."

STUDENT

Bill Meyers: 4301 Shawnee Circle, Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

Age 14: "I have an extensive collection of science fiction, consisting of around 1000 items. I'd love to correspond and trade stf with other people. Am mostly interested in older magazines prior to 1950, with favorite authors being Haggard and Burroughs. Current favorites include Bradbury, Sturgeon, among others."

NIGHT-SHIFT WORKER

Eileen Hines: 65 Franklin St., Valparaiso, Indiana.

Age 39: "I'm a widow, working

the night shift in a local factory. Read every science fiction magazine I can obtain; am trying to write short stories and would like to hear from anyone - - male or female in my age bracket."

INSTRUMENTMAN

Robert V. Hill, IM-1: R-S Div., USS Tidewater, AD-31, % FPO, New York, N.Y.

Age 27: "I'm an instrumentman - - watch-maker - - by trade. I'm interested in the study of telepathy and anything dealing with the mind. Have formed one s-f club and would like to get another going by mail."

MEDICAL STUDENT

H. Frederick Koch: 3708 Dewey Ave., Omaha 5, Nebr.

Age 21: "I'm a freshman medical student; been reading science fiction for about ten years. Started with Edgar Rice Burroughs. Now think Wyndham and Bradbury are tops. Will enjoy hearing from others."

STUDENT

Glenn King, Jr.: 9 E. Main St., Wappinger Falls, N.Y.

Age 14: "I'm a Dodger and Elvis Presley fan (but I do not wear a duck's tail or motorcycle boots!). My hobbies are drawing, writing fantasy and science fiction, astronomy, rocketry, zoology, and paleozoology. I'm handsome, intelligent, charming - - and, as you can plainly see, modest. I'd like to hear from pretty girls and foreign fans."

IMAGINATION

SERVICEMAN

Monte A. Triplett: 3rd Division, DD643, USS Sigourney, % FPO, New York, N.Y.

Age 19: "I'm 5' 11", straw hair, blue eyes, single and poor! I indulge in all sorts of hobbies -- coins, stamps, etc. I'm also a bug for Hi-fi, astronomy and related sciences. I am quite interested in hearing from others with mutual interests."

GOLD PROSPECTOR

Peter Marocco: 209 S. Colorado St., Butte, Mont.

Age 32: "I've been reading science fiction for as long as I can remember. I also collect stamps, and reside here on the richest hill on Earth -- where I am a gold prospector. Will enjoy hearing from anyone."

TEENAGE MISS

Sammi Kinyon: 940 N. 8th St., Spearfish, S.D.

Age 15: "I'm a fifteen year old girl who likes writing, painting, and sports of all kinds. I like music -- from classical to rock 'n roll, and love to write letters. (Maybe someday if the source of the Flying Saucers is Mars I'll have a Martian for a pen-pal!) In the meantime will appreciate hearing from terrestrial teenagers."

MUSIC GRADUATE

Frank Cerbasi: 522 36th St., Union City, N.J.

Age 27: "While I am fond of

science fiction as a hobby, my profession is music, composing and teaching. I'm a Conservatory of Music graduate where I majored in theory and composition. I would like to correspond with men and women with similar interests."

GREENSKEEPER

Zeus de Mello: 1492 Sonoma Ave., Albany 6, Calif.

Age 19: "While my job is a greenskeeper at a golf course, I confess I don't dig the game! My interests run to science fiction fan magazines and experimental prose in s-f. Would like to hear from those who dig the latter two!"

STUDENT

Bill Cote: 706 Homewild, Jackson, Michigan.

Age 16: "I'm a student and would like to correspond with guys and gals interested in science fiction, astronautics, mental telepathy -- or flying saucers!"

STUDENT

Ross Venticek: 983 Carling Ave., Ottawa 3, Ont., Canada

Age 23: "I am currently combining my student status with work in an institution for children here in Ottawa. I would like to hear from other fans in the science fiction world."

STUDENT

Edward Gorman, Jr.: 119 1st Ave., SW, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Age 14: "My interests include jazz, rhythm and blues, s-f, and writing; like to collect old mags which is an interesting but costly hobby! In particular would like to hear from gals with above interests."

STUDENT

Robert Collins: 75 Governors Ave., Medford 55, Mass.

Age 13: "I enjoy all types of science fiction, especially that dealing with the field of psi powers. Like chess, football, basketball -- and girls! Would appreciate letters from anybody, anywhere."

AMATEUR CRITIC

James W. Ayers: 609 First St., Attalla, Ala.

Age 28: "I'm single, and quite interested in science fiction and fantasy. I'd like to correspond with anyone interested in trading, writing or selling (what they write). With regard to the latter, I'd like to exchange ideas on manuscript technique."

STUDENT

Edward Jazdzewski: 2831 S. Herman St., Milwaukee 7, Wisc.

Age 15: "I am a science fiction fan and plan to become an s-f writer on leaving school. I'm extremely interested in ESP and would like to begin a series of experiments across the nation -- or the world, for that matter. Anyone similarly interested, please write me. Also, those interested in writing, purpose to exchange ideas and perhaps work

up collaborative efforts."

MACHINE SHOP EMPLOYEE

R. Arbogast: Gen. Del., Glendale, Calif.

Age 27: "I'm single, five-ten, and am a machinist. I'm interested in contacting others who are interested in ESP, psychology, psionics, hypnotism, mnemonics, and physics. I'd also like to add that perhaps someone can put me in touch with the Gravity Research Foundation."

STUDENT

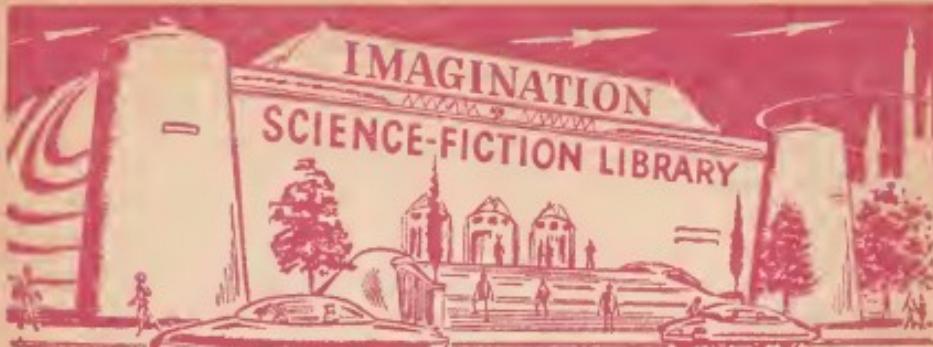
John W. Thiel: 2934 Wilshire St., Markham, Ill.

Age 12: "I belong to five science fiction fan clubs and publish a fan magazine of my own, *Caveat Emperor*. I'm interested in writing and proudly possess a certificate of merit from the 1955 Boy's Life contest. Would like to hear from others in the field and in closing, my favorite artists in the field are Virgil Finlay and Hannes Bok, and authors, Heinlein, Burroughs, and Eric Frank Russell."

S-F ASSOCIATION

Allan Howard: 101 Fairmount Ave., Newark 7, N.J.

Age 43: "I'm married, and have read science fiction since 1927. While I'll write to anyone, I'd like to invite correspondents for our club, the Eastern Science Fiction Association. We have an adult group meeting the 1st Sunday of each month here in Newark. We'd be happy to hear from fans anywhere in the world."



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bolt

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month *IMAGINATION* will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THREE TO CONQUER

by Eric Frank Russell, \$2.50, 224 pp, Avalon Books, 22 East 60th St., New York, N.Y.

Making use of a familiar idea so effectively presented in a number of recent books, but most effectively by Frank Robinson, Eric Frank Russell presents here an entertaining novel. The sensitive telepath, mental tendrils in contact with the invisible world around him, inevitably gets into difficult situations. This theme is exploited capably by Russell, but certainly not with the fire and vehemence of his masterpieces "Sinister Barrier" and "Dreadful Sanctuary."

Luke-warm praise of this sort smacks more of left-handed flattery than admiration — and is intended to be.

If it were not for the natural

skill with words that Russell possesses, I would be forced to say "don't bother."

The story of Wade Harper is in a sense thinly veiled detective fiction. This is not necessarily derogatory, but telepathic sensitivity is not the strongest theme in science fiction.

If you wish a few hours of modest excitement read "Three to Conquer".

It might not be amiss to note here that too few science fiction books are really science fiction — the trend is to mask suspense with this title plus the addition of a bit of gadgetry. The doldrums in which s-f book publishing finds itself, would liven up with the addition of SCIENCE-FICTION to its abused line . . .

POLICE YOUR PLANET

by Eric van Lijn, 224 pages, \$2.50,
*Avalon Books, 22 East 60th St.,
New York 22, N.Y.*

Cops-and-robbers — on Mars. Bruce Gordon, adventurer is asked to stay on Mars and observe — things are brewing. In the crime-ridden Martian cities, Gordon meets weird inhabitants and equally weird incidents.

Period.

To say that this story is a waste of paper is to be cruel. It is not quite that, but in conscience I cannot recommend you spend your time with it.

As long as I have the privilege of reviewing science-fiction, I shall take issue with the horde of publishers producing a host of trivia — again to be charitable. Not every story can be a masterpiece — and this is not expected — but good sound workmanship *can* be expected.

Fortunately mediocre and inferior books are judged ultimately by the consumer. If I sound angry it is because I am angry. You don't transplant a western unchanged to Mars and call it s-f — I think . . . as writers learn apparently only the hard way . . .

IN SEARCH OF WONDER

by Damon Knight, 172 pages, \$4.00,
*Advent Publishers, 3508 N. Sheffield,
Chicago 13, Ill.*

In a collection of twenty-two penetrating and witty essays, Damon Knight analyzes the production of authors as varied as these: Campbell, Heinlein, Sturgeon, Bradbury and Capek. Practically every science-fiction author of repute (and disrepute!) is touched on. All facets of an author's work are examined, from plot, through style, to literateness.

It is difficult for me to be objective about this book because so many of my prejudices are those of Knight. I am happy to see Knight deflate the legend of Bradbury, and fortify the legend of Heinlein. It pleases me to have him point out to authors who should know better a matter about which I've often

howled: kingdoms and empires are not the social systems of the future and cannot be made so convincingly, even in fiction.

Knight quotes liberally from the writers he treats; he cites chapter and verse. I know nothing comparable to this volume that so skillfully and comprehensively and definitely covers science fiction.

I recommend this book without reservation or qualification to anyone interested in literature, writing, or science fiction.

Anthony Boucher provides an entertaining introduction and an appreciation of Knight's work.

For anyone with a serious interest in science fiction this book is a necessity. I plan to read it several times for it is such a persuasive and convincing argument for s-f as literature.

Letters from the Readers

NO FAKE!

Dear Bill Hamling:

Believe me, the best feature in *Madge's* December issue was your reply to Mr. Sol Duncan's letter.

I have enjoyed your "low-brow" literature along with other science fiction magazines. I have also read all the authors Mr. Duncan has mentioned but I still enjoy science fiction—and to go a little further, the company I work for (Rocketdyne Division of North American Aviation) has done much to make reality out of some facets of science fiction printed in years gone by.

I am of the opinion that Sol Duncan is a made-up name and one of your friends is having a good laugh. But just keep up the good work entertaining your readers, which I for one have been.

O. B. Pellegrini
18638½ Clark St.
Tarzana, Calif.

We've never published a fake letter. The Sol Duncan missive in the December issue was legit. Stirred up quite a furor, too. A few of the

replies follow:

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Sol Duncan writes with the supercilious self-consciousness of a high school senior who's just finished "Il Penseroso" and is thereby qualified to speak with authority on what constitutes "mature" literature.

Apparently Mr. Duncan is surrounded by s-f aficionados (he doesn't deserve them) whose intelligence, sensitivity, and vocabularies (if they're typical fen) are such that he cannot help but be bested in any argument with them; so you, *Madge*, and s-f readers in general become his whipping boys.

Reactions to fandom seem to vary with the individual. I'd never met another s-f reader until last Labor Day when I walked into the World S-F Convention at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. What an ego-shrinking experience, to find so many people who know so much about such a variety of subjects. Seemingly unrelated subjects (to the neophyte) but to the discerning

eye of the old-timer, an integral part of every good s-f story.

So I can understand Mr. Duncan's pique, though disagreeing with his rabid denunciation. I don't like feeling "diminished", but it's worth it in science fiction to find so many extraordinary people in an all too ordinary world.

Let's hope he doesn't come back with a sweeping generality on the immaturity of women. Presumably being born of woman would make him an expert on the subject!

Mary Dziechowski
155 Quentin St.
Manhattan Beach
Air Force Station
Brooklyn 35, N.Y.

- *On to another reaction:*

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I was reading the December issue (and enjoying it too!) until I read the overcondemnatory and generally snobbish letter by Sol Duncan.

His remarks smack of unfairness, undue criticism, and dilettantism. He criticized, for example, the cover of the August issue. What did he expect to see, the Mona Lisa?

As for stories, cartoons, and other features, if he had read them in the reasonable (I suppose) attitude in which he reads other literature, and if he had given them the fair chance they deserved, his attitude almost certainly would have been reasonable and more just.

From his letter I gather he seems to set himself up as judge, jury, and executioner—trying a "criminal" he is positive is completely and unquestionably guilty. For one thing, Mr. Duncan—I don't believe you are

being the least bit reasonable. *Madge* (and most other s-f for that matter) is interesting and partly-to-mostly believable (depending on the story).

Science fiction is not trash; if it were, millions of people would not read it throughout the world. They certainly include serious, capable, intelligent people.

Who says s-f is a literary art? I can't recall any person of your high literary knowledge calling s-f a literary art. Also, most s-f readers also enjoy literature by authors and poets whom you would call classicists.

I say, sir, why not take another look?

Roger Scanland
2108 Tenth St.
Wichita Falls, Tex.

Still further reaction:

Dear Bill:

Sol Duncan's letter in the December *Madge* gave me quite a chuckle. I wonder if he realizes how clearly he has characterized himself with that one letter? But I don't think he's a snob. I'd be more inclined to call him a coward. His approach to science fiction reminds me of an embarrassed mother telling her offspring about the facts of life.

His attitude seems to be a case of, "If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me . . ." And he has an idea that if he pretends to understand those deep terms and "profound literature" people will think he too is a pretty smart guy. He's afraid to step out and read something that might amuse or entertain him. He's got to

concentrate on improving himself with "mature" literature. That strikes me as being a pretty narrow and boring outlook.

Obviously, Mr. Duncan believes his letter is addressed to readers of such limited intelligence that they won't see right through him. If he buys future issues of *Madge* to see what he has stirred up (and I think he will) then he's in for a severe shock. People who enjoy the type of literature he mentions would be the last to condemn another type of reading. Those who carp and criticize are the ones who, like Mr. Duncan, read "profound and mature" literature for the impression it makes on other people. Or because someone says it's the thing to read.

This quick acceptance of ready-made ideas is more likely to bring about the end of humanity than all the atomic and hydrogen bombs ever made. The fear of being different is what causes hot rod races and teen-age drug addiction. If you want to read "literature", Mr. Duncan, or if you prefer comic books, that's up to you. But for heaven's sake, do it because it's what you prefer, and not because someone else has said it's the proper thing to do!

We science fiction fans don't bother to improve ourselves with profound literature. We have something better. We know how to think for ourselves.

I had also intended to make a few remarks about Walt Hassett's letter, but this is getting rather long.

Marian C. Oaks
RD No. 2, Box C

Murrysburg, Pa.
No point in our commenting further on the matter except to say the above are but a few of the many rebuttals received. If Mr. Duncan wishes to avail himself of the opportunity for reply he is welcome. . . . With regard to Walt Hassett, his "victim" responds as follows:

HASSETT UNDER FIRE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I noticed Mr. Hassett's letter in the December *Madge*, so I'll address this to him:

I note your letter, especially the part where you say you'll not condemn letters by gals like Janice Jacobson who at least seems to have actually read the magazine. Let me take this opportunity to say that I really appreciate that, sir; I really do.

Man, are you having an attack of male superiority! Tell me, how do you stand on Women's Suffrage?

You imply that the average fem-fan has nothing to say. From my own experience I know that this is not so—it may be that Editor Hamling rarely lets us say it! He edits letters! Quite often I have picked up a copy of *Madge* in which a letter of mine appears, compared it with a copy of the original and shuddered to see my remarks scandalously sliced and rewritten! But I grin and bear it.

Having never tried any lonely hearts clubs, I am not prepared to test your contention that I'd get far better results from them. So far, I have found no need for such methods. But you apparently don't understand that most fem-fans don't

write to *Madge* to have their dimensions published; they write to express an opinion, same as you do. Unfortunately their opinions don't always see print, while their remarks about themselves or IMAGINATION usually do. If I were you, I'd take a closer look at some of those letters. Not all of us think *Madge* is the greatest thing that happened since men, and we say so.

Apparently you have intimidated Editor Hamling to the point where he only printed one letter by a fem-fan. Congratulations.

Pray, what is so insidious about our infiltration? You don't seem to object to the fact that women are writing science fiction, but you deplore the fact that they read it. I do not understand this attitude at all.

In closing I wish to state that I am not now and have never been a housewife. Furthermore, I have never stated in public I am "young and pretty". I usually leave that up to other people.

How do you stand on Women's Suffrage?

Janice Jacobson
2430 Garth Ave.
Los Angeles 34, Cal.

We haven't quite decided here just who is the villain—Walt Hassett or us! Anyway, before Walt lets you in on developments since his letter appeared, let's state that normally we do edit letters. We also edit stories. We edit the art. In fact, we edit, period. It's our job. With regard to your above letter, Janice, we also edited that; however we felt it didn't require as much editing as previous ones. Compare it with your

copy! So we'll quietly sneak away and let Walt take over for the nonce wh

HASSETT SURVIVED

Dear Bill Hamling:

Since I unleashed my recent "blast at the gals" my mailbox has been strained to capacity. To date the score is: from the guys, seven pro . . . two con. From the gals, three pro . . . nineteen con! Hmm. . .

Also, five letters which were obviously facetious. Two were proposals of marriage (such flattery) one "novel" (by that I mean over thirty pages of pencil-scrawled rantings and ravings) an obscene thing the less said of the better, and last, but not least an arsenic-tinted letter from . . . no, I'm not going to tell you just yet. Try to guess!

The thing that amazed me the most, especially in regard to the letters from the gals . . . almost every letter was a well-thought-out, considered opinion of my views of aforementioned "blast". Almost to a person they perceived that my purpose was not merely to climb all over the gals but to awaken them from their lethargy and incense them to produce a few serious, intelligent letters. I was (and am) sick to death of the type of gutless praise they've been allowed to get by with. As I said then, "Make them say something!"

Oh yes, that other letter I was going to mention. Through the arsenic fumes I managed to decipher enough of the angry scrawl within to ascertain that it came from a Miss Janice Jacobson, who seems

to feel I've tread rather heavily upon her dainty toes. Really, I thought I'd treated her rather nicely. Didn't mean to insult her at all . . .

But judging from the tone of her rather incoherent epistle, I believe she would have flown right out here and punched me in the nose — if her broom hadn't been in the garage for repairs!

Oh well, it takes all kinds . . . Sorry I hurt your feelings, Janice; your printed letter didn't lead me to believe you were half as silly as your personal letter did.

I will answer every one of those letters you folks were kind enough to write . . . and any anyone else would care to send my way. (Except, of course, the postal card without an address on it . . . heck, it only said "DROP DEAD!" anyway.)

Walt Hassett
500 Chenango St.
Binghamton, N.Y.

Your next to the last paragraph ties in with Janice's complaint about our editing her letter. Don't know whether to give an apology or take applause . . . fact is letters sometimes go overboard and we have to bring them down to Earth—strange for a science fiction magazine! You'll note yours was close to verbatim. Neatly done, chum . . . wlh

ENJOYABLE ISSUE

Dear Bill:

I've just finished the December issue of *Madge* and think that the lead novel LAST CALL FOR DOOMSDAY was about the best thing I've read in your pages since

the 4-part serial by George O. Smith, HIGHWAYS IN HIDING (March-June 1955 issues). Not that Hamilton yarns haven't been good — I liked them and am looking forward to others by him—but this story had something! Let's have more like it, please.

The shorts were fair to good, the most entertaining to me being Garrett's THE INQUISITOR. Bob Bloch's fanzine column is the best in the field, and very entertainingly written. Let's have a yarn or two by Bob. Your cartoons are the best in the business; but your covers and interior art could stand improving. How about using more McCauley, Smith, and Finlay.

All in all a very enjoyable issue; I'll be watching for future ones.

Herbert E. Beach
210 W. Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

Plenty of new Hamilton novels coming up, Herb. Very glad you like our cartoons. Both Madge and IMAGINATIVE TALES feature the best cartoonists in the field. We're quite proud of them. Bloch? He's a regular contributor to our men's magazine, ROGUE. Read a copy lately? . . . wlh

WORTH WATCHING

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've just finished reading the December issue of IMAGINATION. I've been an s-f fan for about ten years, but I've never been able to find time to follow any one magazine. This issue convinced me that I must make time; here's the money for my subscription.

I am a student of the human

sciences and am, therefore, concerned almost daily with controlled surveys and experiments and operational data. Such stories as THE ALIEN DIES AT DAWN and THE INQUISITOR are both plausible and probable; they are a source of pleasant relaxation and hypothetical speculation. I would certainly appreciate more stories of this kind, which I would term "projectional social science fiction". Both the characters and the happy ending for everyone in LAST CALL FOR DOOMSDAY were implausible and highly improbable. The same may be said about REVOLT OF THE BRAINS with the addition that the plot used, although given a slightly different twist, has been overworked.

The rest of the stories were excellent, and even the two I've objected to were, on the whole, enjoyable.

Joseph B. J. Rice
54 Lenox Place
New Britain, Conn.

Glad you find MADGE stimulating, Joe. You might try our companion magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES, also. But we do hope you never accuse us of a lack of entertainment—which is action and adventure! But then, that's real science fiction—the kind that keeps you breathless to turn the next page, and also prods your imagination and gets you thinking . . . which winds up shop for this month. Why not turn the page, gang, and subscribe. See you next time.....wlh

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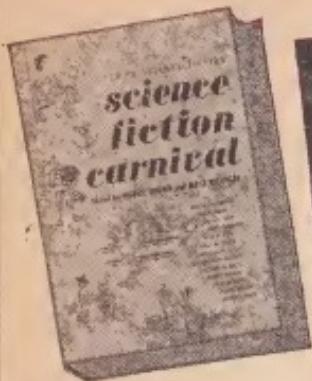
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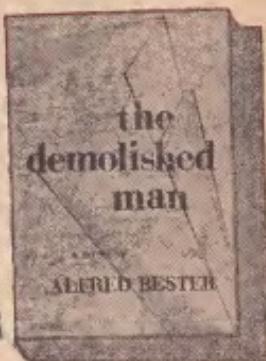
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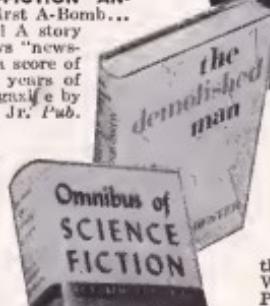
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